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THE INFLUENCE OF POWER AND CLASS ON THE BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION OF CHURCH MEMBERS

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the biblical interpretation of church members in the light of evidence from social science and from liberation theology which suggests that such interpretation will be crucially affected by social background and by power relations within a society. It does so in the central chapters by a series of six bible studies conducted with groups of members from three different congregations within the Church of Scotland. Chapter one provides an introduction to the themes which inform this examination. Chapter two describes the research project and its methodology before chapters three to eight report the discussions held in the groups. Chapter nine looks at the results of the discussions in terms of biblical interpretation and chapter ten returns to many of the themes outlined in chapter one to see how they have been developed by the work done in the groups. It is argued that original suspicions concerning the influence of power and class have been largely strengthened and that we can see at work a dominant theology which universalizes from the experience of a particular group. This leaves those from without that group with the choice of accepting a theology based on the experience of others, or developing their own, local theology. Chapter eleven concludes the thesis by looking at how such a development could be encouraged and enabled.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Is it true that those who are in different social classes read the bible differently? Is it true that such a difference has liberative potential? And, if it is true, why is it that such potential has remained untapped? In order to answer such questions we shall look to social theory and to theories of ideological domination. We shall do so in the hope that such investigation will provide the link between the concern and the witness mentioned on p.3 . Thus we shall seek to use social science for the benefit of the gospel and the church's mission - though Milbank (1990) and others have seen such a use as entirely illegitimate, part of social science's empire building.

'Power' and 'class' run through this thesis not so much as organizing principles, more as threads. They are what to hold on to if the way becomes too labyrinthine. They are, in effect, suspicions. (We shall come to hermeneutics of suspicion later.) Their influence is, at this stage, suspected. The reasons for the suspicion will occupy us in this opening chapter - reasons which have their origin in other disciplines and other places. They are reasons that we suspect do not allow us to prescind from the kind of world they describe - if they are at work there, we must suspect that they are at work here also. It may be that suspicion can only be strengthened or weakened - proof of any absolute kind one way or the other might be beyond us.

If, however, they are strengthened, we shall require to suggest what to do about them. The problem with power is that its presence is suspected by those who do not have it - those with it are usually blissfully unaware of how they are suspected by others. The problem with class is that both its influence and even its existence are hotly contested, sometimes (for its existence) on dogmatic grounds - see Harvey (1987); and sometimes (for its influence) on analytic grounds - see Saunders (1989).

John Milbank asks if there is anything but power. His attack on secular reason is based in large part on the fact, as he sees it, that such reason presumes conflict and the will to power as the sole engine of human progress. Milbank wishes to set this in stark contrast to the Christian way - which is that set out by Augustine in his idea of the alter civitas. To suggest, therefore, that power and our degree of access to it plays a part in how Christians interpret the bible would be anathema to him - part of theology's 'cave-in' to social science. He sees the church as a place of mutual forgiveness and empathetic understanding where all share, all belong and all are of one mind. Sociologists like Peter Berger, with whom Milbank thinks he disagrees, tend to see a community of faith in much the same way - gathered together in such a way as to create tensions only with those outside that community. What this work seeks to examine is not the relationship between the church and those not in the church

but rather relationships between social groups within the church. Against Milbank I will argue that not only does power have a part to play in the ways of the world, it is also crucial in any examination of the church. This is because the lack of such an examination leaves power intact because it works best when it is not noticed. Nicholas Lash (1992) notes that Milbank equates power too easily with violence, seeming to see violence as power's natural mode of self-expression. This seems to imply that only where we can see violence are we likely to encounter power. The thesis which I seek to demonstrate here is that this is not so. There exists within the church a power which is available to some and not to others and which is a real controlling influence in the life of the church. It is a power, however, which does not display itself in anything that could be seen or described as violence. The source of such power is summarized, we suspect, by the word 'class' - but it will be important in this introductory chapter and as we work through the thesis to delineate a little more just what is meant by that.

Before that there is the question: 'why?'. Why should we be concerned with this and why should biblical interpretation be the avenue of investigation? There are two reasons: the first a concern, the second a witness. Many in this land have been concerned with the undeniable fact that the church has failed to reach the poor and has failed therefore to give the poor a voice. At the same

time a witness has come from the poorer parts of the world, notably from Latin America, of the power of scripture in the hands of the poor. This witness is one which echoes the Reformation which Europe experienced in the sixteenth century and is one, perhaps, which Europe has been in need of recovering. Notable in this witness was that provided by Ernesto Cardenal (1977) when he wrote of the study of the bible in Solentiname. Much of the discussions recorded there can be seen to be naive or even simplistic but in the lack of sophistication there emerged the revelatory power of the study of the bible - the power to reveal life and human society and in that revelation to reveal an understanding of God which had liberating potential. The claim made by Cardenal was that the revelation available in Solentiname would not have been available in the convocations of the rich - that within the church itself was an alter civitas previously ignored and marginalized. The question, therefore, for us is whether such a witness can be brought to bear on the marginalization of our own poor.

Liberation theologians have run into trouble in their time largely over this issue, over who wields power and who is subject to that power. More significant still is their strategy for opposing power which comes from the top with a power and a confidence which grows from underneath. We shall learn as we travel that the recognition of the insights of those previously unheard must necessarily

involve the church in strategies to allow them to be heard. This will involve addressing the issue of power much more directly and, as a consequence, confronting directly the issue also of social class.

The major part, therefore, of our exploration of this area will be to examine empirically the existence of variant readings of biblical texts and also to examine areas of agreement where we might have expected to find difference. We shall look for guidance not only to liberation theologians and social theorists but also to church members. This will involve description of a research project of bible study with groups of church members and will constitute the bulk of the thesis - chapter two will describe the conduct of the research and chapters three to eight will give an account of the results. There are two sets of themes which come out of such an examination: the first is the theme of hermeneutics and the second is a renewed and adapted look at the theme of power. These are of course difficult, in the final instance, to separate and they come together in the final chapter when they and the research from which they arise are applied to the mission of the church. This is so because it is impossible to look at variant readings without looking at the possibility of these readings being developed into local theology - that is, theology which grows out of encounter with the bible in the local situation. Local theology is an alternative to universal theology (which seeks to apply the same

understandings in all situations). The question for this thesis, however, is: which understandings? The hypothesis being examined here is that universal theology is in fact the local theology of a particular and powerful group.

The writings of two particular theorists will be used with regard to this question. 'Hegemony' as developed by Antonio Gramsci is particularly helpful as a tool by which to understand the operation of power in the field of ideas and understandings - it describes the phenomenon of the spread of ideas particular to the experience of one group. And the theories of Frank Parkin on meaning systems (dominant, subordinate and radical) will be of special relevance to understanding the working of theology within the church. What will be argued will be that, just as in society at large, there operates within the church a dominant ideology which universalizes from the particular experience of a dominant group. The effect of such domination is the rendering dumb of those who do not share that group's experience. They must either adapt to the understandings of the dominant group (in the process denying the validity of their own experience) or they have to adopt an oppositional stance which builds on their own experience and challenges the universal validity of the experience of the dominant group. What will be argued is that the development of the latter response is the task in many places of the church's mission and the last chapter will seek to develop a model for achieving that which uses

another idea from Gramsci, taken up by liberation theology in general and by Gustavo Gutierrez in particular, that of the organic intellectual. Such a proposal grows out of the writings of both Gramsci and Parkin but also out of the empirical research - a proposal which is centrally concerned with the issue of leadership.

At the heart of the whole thesis is the claim that there are what Peter Berger describes as 'plausibility structures' which make particular claims or theories or understandings acceptable or otherwise and that these are not universal but local. In the society in which we live these plausibility structures are concerned with social class and later in this introductory chapter the case is made for seeing the continuance of class-based understanding both in the society as a whole and also in the church itself. Such a case is important because on it rests much of the rest of the thesis and also the proposals for mission contained in chapter eleven. The rest of this first chapter is therefore a progression through the themes of dominant ideology (explored in more detail in chapter ten), universal and local theology, oppression (which is power seen from below). Class and class struggle is an area which will be examined by looking at social class in modern Britain as seen by researchers from the University of Essex. Finally, the influence of social class (or the lack of it) in the Church of Scotland will be studied through the survey conducted by the church's Board of

Social Responsibility and whose results were published in 1987. These themes are all chosen because of their relationship to the subjects of power and class - for it is on the relationship of these two subjects to bible reading in the church that this thesis depends both for its area of exploration and for its conclusions. In chapter nine we shall look at the results of the bible studies and in chapter ten we shall look more carefully at much of the ground covered of necessity more briefly in this chapter. In chapter eleven a change of gear will take place and we shall look at what the future could hold if ideas such as are expressed here are taken seriously by the church.

This first chapter must of necessity be at least in part a survey of some of the available literature since a scene must be set within which to lay out the results and analysis to come later. The aim will be by the end of this introduction to have mapped out a way through the maze taking account of those who have travelled this way before. The end result of taking these themes seriously should be:

> "a renewed and relevant spirituality, a piety which is not individualistic but personal and social and global, not docetic but incarnational, not compartmentalized but integral and holistic."
> (F.Ross Kinsler, p.13)

Kinsler sees this aim as being fundamentally tied in with the ability of people to produce their own biblical interpretations which can communicate in their own cultural and social context:

> "The challenge to the Christian church, which has a

> mission to the entire oikumene, is not simply to translate but to interpret the dynamic equivalence of the Gospel, the Bible, and the church in every culture, subculture, and community. The only possible way that this can be attempted is to invite and equip the people of God in every place to be the interpreters." (F.Ross Kinsler, p.9)

It is this centrality of biblical interpretation in the hands of church members, particularly those who have had little chance to offer their own interpretation before, which informs what follows.

Dominant Ideology and Liberation Theology

For now, let us look a little further at the theory of dominant ideology. This theory comes from a renewed interest on the part of Marxists in post-war Europe in the superstructure part of the base-superstructure dichotomy. One of its principal advocates (from whom many other theorists took their cue) was Antonio Gramsci. From him we have inherited the greatly influential concept of hegemony. It is important here because not only can it be used as an aid for interpreting the class consciousness of modern Scotland, but it is also behind much of the analysis employed by liberation theologians to describe the situation of Latin America and its church. (Notable here is Gustavo Gutierrez' A Theology of Liberation, 1974.) Hegemony "expresses the notion of leadership which is as much ideological as political or repressive." (Abercrombie et.al., 1980, p.12). While Gramsci's own use of the term

was not always consistent it can be summed up by reference particularly to this word 'leadership' which manages to combine repression and consent. Put in the context of society, therefore, ideology is clearly part of the power structure of that society. For Gramsci the stability of any society will depend on its ability to produce a working class which is morally and politically passive - ie. it does not have the same ideology as the ruling class but it regards its own ideology as weak and inferior. This, he says, can only be overcome by a mass political party whose main purpose, as the protagonist of change must be "the intellectual preparation of the working class [which] is of critical significance in capitalist societies . . . whose downfall will largely be produced by ideological struggle." (Abercrombie et.al., 1980, p.15).

We now turn to liberation theology and its use (often implied rather than stated) of theories of dominant ideology, particularly its use of the ideas of Gramsci and hegemony. Gutierrez refers only once in A Theology of Liberation (1974) to Gramsci (in a reference to the idea that theologians might become "organic intellectuals") and not at all to hegemony. It would seem clear, however, that it is this kind of thinking which informs much of what is written there on development and the problems created by that view of the world. Such thinking becomes more overt when we turn to the less explicitly theological work of Freire. (We shall return to Gramsci in chapter ten and to

organic intellectuals and Freire in chapter eleven.) For an extended discussion of ideology with direct and conscious relevance for theology, however, we need to turn to Juan Luis Segundo and his book The Liberation of Theology, 1977.

Segundo's thoughts on ideology stem from his thinking on faith. The faith of humans, he says, is not (any more than anything else) universal. Everything, even God, is particular for them. Faith must at all times be related to the historical reality with which one is faced.

> "Faith is an absolute insofar as it is a truth revealed by God, an absolute truth. But insofar as it is destined to perform a function that is not faith itself, even revealed truth and our adherence to it constitutes something relative." (Segundo, 1977, p.154)

Ideology is, he says, what constitutes such a relationship. It is ideology which relates and relativizes. Without ideology, faith is left in a vacuum with no connection possible with the real world. Because of this, it is possible to see the positive role which ideology can perform - one of particularization. It is this function of being the link between principle and action which conforms well with Gramsci's functional definition of the intellectual. The point is one of contextualization - perhaps the principal point of theological methodology which liberation theology has gifted to the rest of the theological enterprise.

> "Only on the basis of this contextual option does theology begin to have any meaning at all; and it retains meaning only insofar as it remains in touch

with the real-life context." (Segundo, 1977, p.76)

It is when Segundo attempts to delineate what might be meant by all this that he begins to cause concern in more traditional church circles. His point is that the contextualization and particularization which is ideology's function cannot be switched on and off - it is a constant. Thus if nothing is general then love, for example, is not general either. When it comes to its application in the real-life situation love must be focussed and not diffuse. The love of God as expressed by the servants and the people of God cannot be spread out thinly and evenly, but rather must it be expressed as being in favour of some and, in consequence, against others:

> "this process of discriminating between real people must be attended with anxiety, crises, and sins. But that is the condition for being a human being. Man ever remains simul iustus et peccator." (Segundo, 1977, p.159)

What does this mean for the enterprise being undertaken here? It signifies the importance of the attempt to understand the role of ideology when exploring the faith of church members. It begins to focus for us the challenge which liberation theology poses to the church of the 'first world' - the challenge which says that the result of classical, generalised theology has been to keep the powerful with their power and the oppressed in their oppression. It also begins to show us the role of opposition in response to such a situation - the second of Parkin's options for those of the dominated class. What, therefore, our project must be is the analysis of the

working of the influence of ideologies on the reading of the bible and on the minds of church members in such a way as to understand better how contextualization might leave its mark on us as it has in Latin America. In order to prepare the way for such an analysis, the rest of this chapter will look at the three inter-related themes of local theology, oppression and class - and then go on to justify their use in relation to British society and to the Scottish church. It will be in our ability to hold these themes together that our chances of producing a liberative approach to church life will be tested. That is because we will note that liberation here becomes defined as the liberation of the interpretations of those not of the dominant class to be set to work in the church and the world.

Universal Theology and Local Theology.

All of the above gives rise to a series of questions. If theology grows out of experience are there, for example, limits to the types of experience which are relevant or admissable? If local theologies are to be encouraged, what are the constraints, if any, upon them? Might it be that theology must inform experience as well as experience informing theology? How, in other words, can local inform universal theology while being open to its influence? We need to be aware, surely, that such an openness could

nullify the project, there being such a disparity in power and influence and prestige. Is there some kind of dialectical process which can be identified, therefore, which could operate without local theology being taken over by the sheer size and weight of the universal theology of the accumulated years? Such questions begin to show that this whole area must be looked at in the context of the operation of power and it will be argued below that this means we take class analysis seriously. Liberation theology sees itself as a challenge to all existing theology through its work at the base. This it sees as work of empowerment. In all such work, of course, there is the danger of co-option - the process whereby a dominant group attempts to disarm the kind of opposition which this enterprise involves by taking over its concepts and turning them round to its own ends. (Kee, 1990, refers to this and his argument is examined below.) Where liberation theology refuses to be co-opted by the church's universal theology, it has been seen to begin to take itself outside the realms of theological discourse altogether. If theology is a second step, a reflection on action, it is argued that action becomes the defining factor, leaving theology as an optional extra for those intellectuals so inclined. The question is asked: are there other, perhaps equally valid, ways of doing that reflection? If so, does theology have any role to play at all in what is referred to as liberation theology? It might, of course, be taking things too far to say that because faith without works is

dead, the only thing that matters is the works. It is, however, an argument which needs to be faced and made because even if one argues that theological discourse is the only discourse suitable for questions of ultimate meaning, there is still a danger that theology becomes interpreted then simply as moral philosophy.

If, however, we argue that 'ultimate' meaning and 'absolute' value change from place to place (that is, that meaning and value are local rather than universal), we then have to ask if such terms as 'ultimate' and 'absolute' are applicable. (In the terms to be used later in this chapter and again in chapter ten, we might ask if 'common sense' is really 'common' at all.) One might argue that meaning only follows analysis but that in turn only begs the question about what analysis and who is doing it and what are the methods and presuppositions. In all of this, therefore, we are looking at power and its location. The Vatican attempt to reaffirm the power of universal theology has done so by repudiating the attempt to combine theology and biblical analysis with social analysis and political commitment - such a procedure, it has said, takes liberation theology away from the faith of the church and even implies the negation of that faith in practice. It, like Milbank, has attacked secular rationality at the same time and we can see this as tied in with the universal/local dichotomy as well. The idea here would be that what is 'rational' might vary from place to place and that in order to identify what

is rational, some social analysis is not only desirable but entirely necessary. Berger's plausibility structures therefore come very much to the fore but they do so here as a challenge to those who argue that what is plausible in one place will clearly be just as plausible anywhere else. The notion of power is also fully in play, since the attempt to impose plausibility from without is an attempt to use power (of whatever kind). This use of power may be seen as a necessary preservation of unity from above - but from below it can look very much like oppression.

Views from Below and from Within.

The subject of oppression once again raises a series of questions. Is oppression systemic or personal? Is there a way through institutional sin to institutional salvation? The whole debate about oppression concerns power and therefore analyses of power have to be undertaken. For example, in the Roman Catholic Church much debate centres around ideas of authority - this concerns power. We may have to ask about where the power lies in the Church of Scotland. Opposition to hierarchical authority must depend upon empowerment of the laity and all that that entails. We may find, therefore, that we need to heed Sobrino's call to kenosis and voluntary marginalisation - the task being not so much to convert the centre as to move it to the periphery because new power for one group means that power

must be taken from another. This involves an analysis of that power and of its relationship to ideology and thus ties in with the empirical studies (chapters three to eight). Liberation theology in its opposition to oppression can end up in utopianism. Perhaps liberationism's strength is indeed in utopianism rather than in diagnosis - the negation of all that is being a promise of what is not. But all that still requires an accurate idea of what is - you cannot be properly utopian without being sufficiently diagnostic.

"The task of theology is to explain the world in all its gruesomeness and all its injustice and to give it a name," (Horkheimer). Does this mean theodicy? The view from below, according to liberation theology, implies a different kind of theodicy - a difference cited by Miranda and explored further in chapter nine. But the study of gruesomeness and injustice as central to theology is something which we shall find is increasingly important as we go through this work. Quite unexpectedly theodicy became a central issue when analyzing the bible studies related in chapters three to eight. Comblin (The Church and the National Security State, 1979) sees liberation theology as the exploration of that which is currently absent - the intimation of the reality of which can be found in the longings and sighs of those below. Might the real project of all this, therefore, be the return of God to a world which has forgotten him? This is seen via the

affirmation of human well-being, of the power of love, of the negation of alienation - the recovery of a subjectivity which has its fulfillment in an existence above and beyond possessive individualism. Alistair Kee, in his recent book (1990) suggests that Marx had to outgrow Feuerbach (though, significantly, not Hegel) because Feuerbach could not conceive of species-being as social rather than individual and contemplative. This is really the same argument as exists between liberation theology and the Vatican. Such an argument bears centrally upon oppression because oppression exists primarily at the point of our most basic humanity - it is about the attempt to deny us the very basis of our existence. Therefore our understanding of oppression and also about how it is to be opposed will depend on where we understand the location of our basic humanity to be. In other words, where do we exist - within ourselves or within society? This dichotomy in understanding of human existence can be expressed (as below) in class terms - our understanding here will depend on our own experience of life and society. The notion of opting out (of education, health care, etc.) and the ideas behind a privatised society will have their reflection, among those who have the means to follow this kind of course of action, in how people understand their own existence. The question for the church, then, is how this translates itself into an understanding of the faith or into ability to receive certain messages and an inability to receive others. Here we have to address the ideas of

ideology and consciousness. We have to ask, with Marx and Kee, what role religion has played in this and what effect that role has had. We are dealing here with existence and where it has its basis and it is thus, says Kee, an ontological rather than a moral problem. If then the question is one of existence rather than one of consciousness, and if the former is primary, then, Kee argues, we cannot talk about liberation in the absence of changes in the means of production.

This indeed is a major thesis of his book - that liberation theology has failed in its project because it has fallen for ideology and idealism and failed to see that liberation can only come about by changes in how people live. In the context of Latin America these theologians have failed to come to terms with Marx's thoughts on agrarian economies and the need for industrialisation and capitalism as progressive forces. Oppression, in other words, cannot be tackled on the level of consciousness without first being tackled on the level of existence. We might wonder, however, if Marx really had the last word to say on capitalism and if his 19th century view of progress is still valid today. Kee argues that Marx was talking about a force in human history which exists independently of human will and intention. He says that Marx was assuring those who struggled under the yolk of oppression that their lot was not inevitable but would inevitably be overcome. There is, he says, redemption at work. Guevara broke with

Marxist analysis of economic and social history by rejecting the idea of capitalism as a progressive force - and it is to Guevara and the Cuban revolution that liberation theology looks for much of its inspiration and analysis (indeed Segundo has said that a life modelled on Guevara is every bit as admirable and valid as a life modelled on Christ). This would explain the consistent inability in liberation theology fully to integrate Marx - although the other factor at work is the conservative theology which is consistently present alongside the radical political commitment. Kee argues that the progressive influence on liberation theology came not from Guevara but from Vatican 2 - from the Pope. Kee goes through various liberationist writers and claims that they all fall down at the same point - they fail to criticize the church with the same tools that they use for the criticism of society. There is a need in the end, says Kee (p.282) for transcendence which comes, not from beyond, but from within the present situation, taking us beyond. He argues, therefore, for a kind of total immersion in the world - in the belief that there is a process independent of us of which we can become a part. This implies a totally different ecclesiology - one with which institutional churches would be very uncomfortable. It may be, however, one which matches the theme of kenosis and one which, in the last analysis, has the same class-based acceptance with which the whole of this study is concerned. It is certainly one which lends itself to seeing the

answers to oppression as being local and specific and therefore to seeing reflection on oppression, liberation, bible and church as also appropriate at the local rather than the universal level.

Class and Class Struggle.

One way, and it will become clear that I see it as the most suitable way, of looking at local frameworks is to look at social class. What, we must ask therefore, are the problems posed by ideas of class and class struggle to the maintenance of a universalist theology? Such analyses and struggle always produce questions about leadership and authority. What, therefore, are the ideas of leadership (either universal or local) which lead on to ideas of authority? More specifically, what is authentic leadership, where is its legitimacy found, who uses it, and who cedes it? It might be, for example, that the idea of the authority of the marginalized is where political commitment and biblical witness really do combine effectively and powerfully. We need, however, to distinguish authority from domination - and to note the consequences of doing so. The concept of empowerment may, in fact, provide a preliminary answer and there may be a useful tie-up here with a distinction between 'church' and 'people of God' in terms of authentic and inauthentic authority. Such a tie-up would suggest that authentic authority enables and empowers - it turns the church over

to the people of God. There is a problem with terms here which will only be resolved as we proceed through the thesis. It is this: that the idea of turning the church over, the idea of ceding authority, the idea of kenosis itself, implies that those who cede are the current possessors of an authority which they are going to use to empower those who currently have no such authority. To accept such terminology means at least two things: firstly it means that we are accepting a role for class analysis in the affairs of the church; and secondly it means that there is an indispensable role to be played in this by those who are currently dominant - or at least a proportion of them. The problem about empowerment, when linked in this way with what is in effect a leadership role for the middle class (to which we shall return more than once later in the thesis), is that the two cannot for long be maintained together. There tends to be a regulation of dissent and the mediation of ideas. Such regulation leads us to thoughts on ideology as mediation, as a filtering of available options, as perhaps false consciousness or unnecessary limitation.

Cardinal Ratzinger's criticism of liberation theology (1984, 1986) rests on its commitment to Marxism, class analysis and class struggle and to his clear belief that such commitment must be limited. Class struggle, he maintains, becomes in liberation theology a doctrine which determines the significance of all else - once the Marxist

view of the world is taken on board, the analysis it provides predetermines the significance or lack of it of all else. Ratzinger prefers to see class analysis replaced by an analysis of 'severe social conflict' - this has the effect of removing thinking from the system to the supposedly unintended and avoidable outcomes of the system's malfunction. What class analysis and indeed liberation theology would say is that severe social conflict is the inevitable outcome of particular ways of organising society and that it can only be overcome by clear analysis of that society - that is by class analysis since it is a class-based society with which we are concerned. (The assertion of class society needs, of course, to be defended and will be later in this chapter.) The question arises here of how the church comes in to the picture. There is the position held by Ratzinger of the privileged access to truth held by the church - which is opposed by the liberationist idea of the epistemological privilege of the poor. We shall see in the report later of the research project how this particular debate developed. Much of Ratzinger's argument revolves around the classic dichotomy between how the lower and upper classes view inequality and poverty. Ratzinger, in these instructions, takes the classic middle/upper class view of a stratified society as opposed to a more conflictual idea of how society operates and here we see the choice offered to dominated classes by Parkin: adaptation or opposition. There is also going on here a fairly traditional

individualism versus collectivism argument. According to Ratzinger, sin and salvation are both irrefutably individual while liberationism would put much more emphasis on the collective. Thus is contained here the very nub of an argument about oppression and about sin: the answer concerns not only the locus of one's basic humanity but also the source of attack on that humanity and the resources available to turn back such an attack.

Social Class in Modern Britain.

In order to justify this emphasis on class, we obviously must be able to provide some evidence that such a theme is relevant to this research. Marshall et.al. (1988) take on board the task of discussing whether or not British society can still be discussed in class terms. They write from a Weberian point of view but discuss both Goldthorpe, who is also a Weberian, and Wright, who is a Marxist. Wright puts much more emphasis on economic exploitation and oppression - here a real point where liberation theology shows its Marxist roots. Wright rejects one of Weber's central considerations - status, though the role of status in power and prestige cannot so easily be dismissed. We shall find that dominant ideas and their spread are central to our analysis and it might be unwise to suggest that status has no part to play in that domination. In addition, Weber uses the idea of life-chances to suggest a trajectorial

view of class. This is in danger of taking class purely into the realm of consciousness without any necessity for objective reference because one's class becomes the social position where one sees oneself going. This may have some point when it comes to students living in poor conditions on very low income but with every expectation of moving rapidly into a well paid job with career prospects. It loses some of its point if the trajectory is a temporally extended one. This point becomes highly relevant, therefore, when it comes to those (including critics of the book) who place social mobility very high on their list of arguments for saying that Britain is no longer a class society. There has to be some way of distinguishing when and if the idea of trajectory is relevant for class analysis and it seems to me that the use of time is as relevant as any - otherwise class could become a psychological rather than a social phenonemon. What is being dealt with here, however, is in some sense indeed psychological in that the point at issue is how people translate whatever objective circumstances they find to be their lot into understanding and faith. Marshall et. al. are keen to promote what they term a unified moral order - which they see as lacking in modern Britain. This may tie in above with the thoughts around universal and local theology because we need to be extremely wary, as we shall see later, of anything which lays claim to a unified moral order since such unity is likely to mean a suppression of other voices. It is in a sense the same kind of debate

which surrounds the Vatican argument with liberationism over uniformity and difference. It is interesting, therefore, to see the same issues being raised on a purely sociological level here in terms of class and class analysis.

In their chapter on 'The moral order of a capitalist society', these authors are concerned to understand how people in Britain today understand the society in which they live. They contrast the finding that most people have a concern for distributive justice with the finding that most people also think that there is little or nothing likely to be done to make our society more just in these terms. They ask the question:

> "Why has class identity, and the belief that significant moves towards social justice and economic change are both desirable and possible, been so resolutely transmuted into an instrumental concern for personal welfare rather than a politics of protest and reform?"(Marshall et.al., 1988, p.161)

Their answer is in terms of 'informed fatalism'. People believe that though something could be done, nothing in fact will be done - and therefore they see their task as being one of self-advancement rather than one of social advance. "Present party politics are an object of widespread cynicism." (Marshall et.al., 1988, p.164) The authors thus combine instrumentalism with fatalism as being two facets of the same phenomenon. Although people will subscribe to class identities, they will not become part of any movement which seeks to mobilise people along the lines of class interest.

From the above they reach their conclusion that there is no moral order underpinning British society and go on to pose larger questions which arise because of this - questions about links between social structure and beliefs. They want to know if, for example, the possession of privilege will lead an individual to the defence of privilege as a social fact. This discussion of moral order, therefore, inevitably leads to a discussion of class consciousness.

The authors discuss Wright's research in Sweden and America and note, among other problems, that in his survey of responses to various general propositions he fails to catalogue consistency of response. This, one feels, must be catastrophic for any hope of an advance based on this material. This failure leaves us without any idea, as the authors state, of whether or not we should expect consistency of response. The authors complain that Wright concentrates on class relationships while ignoring what they would regard as equally valid reference points of gender or home-ownership - it could be said in response, however, that it is only fairly recently that home-ownership and class relations have parted company in a quite deliberate attempt to destroy old class loyalties - the question remains as to what new loyalties will take their place - or if there will be any loyalty above that to the self.

As a response to this perceived need for consistency or

something like it, the authors here decide to go for what they call 'congruence'.

> "Given these difficulties of interpretation, where the issues of logical and technical consistency are concerned, it is more profitable, from our point of view at least, to explore the degree of normative or ideological congruence in the world-views of our respondents. To what extent are people's beliefs and values concordant? For example, are they consistently 'egalitarian' across a range of issues, regardless of whether the issues themselves are logically or technically related?" (Marshall et.al., 1988, p.176)

They do not find this perfect concordance (and neither, as will be seen, was concordance easily available in the research for this thesis). They go on, however, to state that their study supports the thought that Britain is not a post-class society but still very much a class one. The trouble when getting in to the area of class-consciousness is that, as here, we can start by comparing class with attitude and end up by defining class by attitude - another way of turning class into a psychological phenomenon.

> "Sectoral cleavages (as represented by housing tenure, dependency on welfare benefits, and production sectoral location) are more or less irrelevant as explanations of the variation in class-consciousness, while sex, income and educational attainment are wholly so." (Marshall et.al., 1988, p.181)

Class-consciousness, they find, is not consistent. It is, they say more a question of organization than of awarenesss - might not 'consciousness' be therefore a misnomer? They refer here to Frank Parkin's idea of normative ambivalence - judgements on theoretical grounds are governed by the dominant value system; but concrete instances provide the grounds on which the 'subordinate value-system' comes into its own. This is absolutely central to the whole idea of

this work: that encounter with local reality can provide a whole new perspective for universal theory and that therefore theology must take into account local circumstances and experience or it will fail to touch real life - which is not to say that there can be no element of objective judgement: it is not about telling people what they want to hear, but rather about knowing what they can understand. Thus dominant ideology cannot be challenged by an equally abstract ideology but only by concrete action. Thus class-consciousness as an instrument of social change can only be expressed through class organisation.

It is important to enter a caveat here. Reference to class organisation, class consciousness and social change can begin to imply a natural or even automatic progression. No such progression exists. Pahl and Wallace (1988) quote Marshall when he says that, "working-class consciousness is apparently ambivalent, volatile and even self-contradictory." (Pahl and Wallace, 1988, p.128) Class as a descriptive device, they say, cannot easily be translated into a theoretical concept. In modern society, they claim, status based on consumption is central - as is 'domesticity' (p.140f.). Such emphasis finds support in the report later on empirical research where much discussion on oppression centres around domestic arrangements - at least in one of the groups. What must be recognized, however, is that both domestic arrangements and consumption are themselves part of a wider culture or

pattern which can be described in terms of class - without making the leap, against which Pahl and Wallace warn, from there into class as an all-embracing or even all-explaining theoretical concept.

Marshall et.al. have received criticism for being part of the sociological left-wing conspiracy. Among their critics are Ray Pawson ("Bias in Sociological Methods", Sociology, 1990) and Peter Saunders ("Left Write in Sociology", Network, 1989). Both these articles challenge the methodological basis of the work done at Essex - accusing the authors of setting up the answers in advance and posing questions designed to elicit certain responses. A challenge is also presented which ties in with Ratzinger's criticism of liberation theology - that just as Ratzinger argues that once a Marxist perspective is adopted everything immediately becomes seen in terms of class struggle, so Saunders argues that the significance of certain statistics is predetermined by Marshall and his colleagues because of their theoretical assumptions:

> "Alice in Wonderland conclusions on the basis of the empirical evidence in front of them reflect the socialist assumptions from which these writers start out. The first of these assumptions is that the only change worth talking about is one where the working class gain at the expense of those above them. The fact that the capitalist economy has grown to the benefit of everybody is seen as irrelevant."
> (Network, 1989, p.4)

Saunders goes on to argue that talents and energy will inevitably be unequally distributed through any population and that inequality of outcome will be an equally

inevitable result. Equality of outcome, however, is "a classic socialist preoccupation" (p.4). It is in the claim by Marshall et.al., though, that social class represents the primary locus of social identity in modern Britain, that Saunders sees not merely mistaken analysis of data but wayward methodology for collecting the data in the first place.

> "Are we seriously to believe that in their everyday lives people think of themselves as members of a class rather than, say, as British, or as parents, or as white or black, or as male or female, young or old, married or single, drinkers, smokers, football supporters...?" (Network, 1989, p.4).

Saunders is thus making a claim for the reinstatement of common-sense into sociological discourse - the same 'common-sense' against which I was warned so often and so vehemently from the very day I started to study the subject. It will be important for this study to look at ideas of common-sense for the point of local theology as opposed to universal theology is that it argues that sense is not something which is inherent to species-being but rather does it belong in the realm of social-being. We therefore do not hold sense in common around the world - it is very much culture-related. The point made by Marshall and his colleagues, therefore, that there is in Britain today no universally accepted moral order, is of great significance here because it touches on what is seen as common-sense. Saunders, it seems, is making a claim for a universally accepted view of life in Britain today which the authors whom he criticizes challenge. It is the argument of this present piece of work that experience,

particularly social experience, makes some things credible and others not, some things understandable and others not. The data which will be examined later, therefore, will be seen to be supportive more of the Marshall position than of that taken by Saunders. Marshall and Rose, in replying to the criticisms of Saunders, reject his points but the most important point that they make for our present purposes is that the advance created by capitalism may have moved everyone forward but that it has not moved those at the rear any nearer to those at the front. They also make the obvious point that Saunders manages to display a fair bit of bias of his own by trying to imply, despite much evidence to the contrary, that Britain is a meritocracy. At this point Ray Pawson takes up the cudgels.

Pawson argues that all sociological interpretation of data is just that - interpretation, inevitably carried out from a particular perspective and with unavoidable presuppositions: "All such judgements are inevitably relative to the theoretical persuasions of those sitting in judgement." (Sociology, 24.2, p.239) The major failure, he says, of the Marshall work is the failure of its authors to treat "biographical details as dependent variables in a way that systematically relates to the rival class theories." (Sociology, 24.2, p.237) He connects this to Wright who insists that "empirical adjudications are always between rival concepts or propositions, not directly between propositions and the 'real world' as such," (quoted in

Sociology, 24.2, p.232). Even Pawson seems to be saying therefore that the real world and its interpretation depends entirely on the experience and world-view of the interpreter and that therefore no class can claim authority to argue its views as more objective than any other class - dominant ideology has no automatic or rational right to its dominance. When Marshall and Rose reply to Pawson and also to Emmison and Weston (who challenge the importance of class from the point of view of their research in Australia), they argue firstly that class can be important even when class struggle is not; and secondly that "class is a process rather than a static condition." (Sociology, 24.2, p.265) With this statement they may be returning us once more to the Weberian notion of trajectory in class analysis. It is in itself, however, something of an enigmatic statement and would require something more empirical by way of illustration before its full impact would be available.

When Colin Bell comes to review this book in The Sociological Review, November 1989, he applauds its emphasis on practice, the practical implications of class consciousness, and he applauds also the move here from study of class consciousness from individuals to the collectivity. He quotes from p.222 of the book:

> "The changing forms of distributional struggle are not a matter, at least primarily, of altering individual awareness but are instead, more a question of straightforward organizational capacity. Lower-class systems carry no particular implications for social integration unless they are seen changing

organization context." (The Sociological Review, November 1989, p.791)

It may be, however, that it is this very practicality of emphasis and the importance given to the implications for voting that obscures what might be, at least for this study and perhaps on a wider canvas, the most revealing results of all. That is that the social context within which one lives and breathes has an effect not only on how we cast our vote in the ballot box but also on how we see the world and the people in it. We all, by this way of thinking, are capable of seeing the universal within the particular - or, perhaps better, we all generalize from the particular. This process, therefore, if it really does exist must mean for us in the church a huge shift of perspective in what we might understand as mission or as the preaching of the word of God. For if our understanding is so caught up in how we live our lives and the context of that living, then it is not enough for sociology or the church to provide a new language to describe our existence, as Emmison and Weston seem to suggest in the context of class consciousness, but the need is for a new kind of experience to provide content for the language. Marshall et.al. talk of congruence between a range of different questions and the responses to them; but the church has to deal with a lack of congruence between the language of love and self-sacrifice and the reality of lives of self-seeking and individualism. It might be that unless there is a closer alignment then the language will become meaningless (perhaps it already has) and that the church itself will follow the language it uses

into the abyss of meaninglessness. Thus it is that the absence of a discussion of alienation and particularly of anomie in the volume by Marshall et.al. is especially disappointing. Might it be that Alistair Kee was right to talk of the need for theology to be immersed in the real world of the present if it is to have any hope of realising its mission for a future? In other words, the church can talk in universals which have little hope of making sense in places where they are devoid of particular, experiential meaning. However, if the particular can produce styles of living and action which give rise locally to new experience and hence language, then the mission of the church becomes realizable - because it is locally defined. Such thinking is not readily understood within the church, to which I now turn.

The Lifestyle Survey.

The Church of Scotland published its Lifestyle Survey (1987) through its board of Social Responsibility. It was a report of findings from a questionnaire which surveyed about 1,000 people in Scotland about their religious and political affiliation, commitment and participation and their opinions on moral, religious and social matters. The aim of the survey was to enable the church to assess its situation and to establish its priorities. If there was current evidence from within the church to support the thesis of Marshall and his colleagues that social class was

indeed a significant factor in modern society, this was surely where to look. A quick look at the contents page, however, might disabuse us of any overconfidence on that score. This shows that the material collected is to be analyzed in terms of church membership, age, gender, commitment. There is no mention, however, of social class. Is this, we might ask, simply evidence for the reluctance mentioned by John Harvey (1987) even to mention such matters within the church? Is this part of the conspiracy to deny such a possibility because of the implications it might have for the universality of the gospel? It would appear not.

The report was compiled by the board with the help of their academic consultant, Dr. Alex Robertson of the University of Edinburgh. In an attempt to discover the reasoning behind the decision not to discuss class as an issue, as an independent variable, I interviewed Dr.Robertson. His account of the process which led to this publication indicates that the Board of Social Responsibility was actually quite keen to see class as significant but that the statistics gathered from the survey simply did not provide the evidence to justify such an approach. In order further to test this, Dr.Robertson agreed to produce further figures from the original material as requested for the specific purpose of this research.

The first aspect to look at is those instances where

statistical significance could be established. The questions where this occurred were as follows:

the importance of school teachers,

the level of unemployment,

the making of foolish decisions,

the achievement of goals,

the importance of political discussion,

the desire to change society,

the importance of saving,

the value of reducing material standards,

recent excitement or interest,

the importance of Christian education,

opportunity for baptism as a reason for church membership.

It would be both unilluminating and tedious to go through all these eleven points in turn. What might be more helpful would be to look in more detail at three: the making of foolish decisions, the achievement of goals and the desire to change society. The class breakdown in these figures is according to the Registrar General's classification - there are many, of course, who find such a methodology problematic but it is used here in order to avoid the necessity to create a new schema and divert the present work from its principal task.

When asked to agree or disagree with the statement, "Compared with other people of my age, I've made a lot of foolish decisions in my life," responses from those whose

social class could be established were as follows:

class I - agree 3, disagree 29

class II - agree 21, disagree 96

class III - agree 47, disagree 162

class IV - agree 23, disagree 45

class V - agree 2, disagree 1.

Thus the percentages of those in each class who agreed with the statement run:

class I - 9%

class II - 18%

class III - 22.5%

class IV - 34%

class V - 66.6%.

While we can safely say that the number in class V is too low for any proper implications to drawn from that figure, there is nevertheless an easily identifiable trend in these findings. Such a trend here can be compared to the figures from our next statement: "When I think back over my life I didn't get most of the important things I wanted." The answers here were as follows:

class I - agree 3, disagree 29

class II - agree 15, disagree 102

class III - agree 49, disagree 162

class IV - agree 26, disagree 43

class V - agree 3, disagree 0.

These translate into the following percentages for those agreeing:

class I - 9%

class II - 13%

class III - 23%

class IV - 37.7%

class V - 100%.

The same trend can be identified with the same caveats attached. Here, however, it is worth interjecting the responses to a similar but importantly different statement: "I've got pretty much what I expected out of life."

Class I - agree 25, disagree 7

class II - agree 91, disagree 26

class III - agree 160, disagree 49

class IV - agree 44, disagree 24

class V - agree 3, disagree 1.

These percentages, then, need to be concentrated on the negative response to compare to what has come before:

class I - 22%

class II - 22%

class III - 23.5%

class IV - 35.3%

class V - 25%.

There is displayed here a clear difference between desire and expectation. If we compare the "dissatisfaction rating" of the two sets of responses (desire followed by expectation) we find this:

class I - 9%, 22%

class II - 13%, 22%

class III - 23%, 23.5%

class IV - 37.7%, 35.3%

class V - 100%, 25%.

Expectation is obviously a great leveller. The trend which could be clearly seen in the responses to the first two statements at which we looked is flattened out to a remarkable degree when the factor of expectation is added. It is almost as if those who were saying that they had made mistakes and had not got what they wanted were also saying that the mistakes and the unfulfilled desire were inevitable, just part of the way things are. Are we seeing here support for the informed fatalism posited by Marshall et.al.?

Let us then look at the responses to the statement: "I want to change society." These are:

class I - agree 12, disagree 19

class II - agree 45, disagree 68

class III - agree 71, disagree 139

class IV - agree 20, disagree 49

class V - agree 4, disagree 0.

The percentages of those wishing to change society are thus: class I - 39%

class II - 40%

class III - 33.8%

class IV - 29%

class V - 100%.

This is clearly not the same pattern as displayed in the first two responses examined. This too, however, can be compared to the response to another similar, but

significantly different, question: "I would like to change society so that material things matter less." Here the responses are as follows:

class I - agree 17, disagree 15

class II - agree 83, disagree 34

class III - agree 124, disagree 83

class IV - agree 38, disagree 31

class V - agree 3, disagree 0.

When translated into percentages, then, the figures of those who would like to see society changed so that material things mattered less are like this:

class I - 53%

class II - 71%

class III - 60%

class IV - 56%

class V - 100%.

It was obviously necessary to qualify what was meant by the changing of society before classes I-IV, or most of them, felt able to give their assent.

What is indicated here is that even within the church one's view of life and the world and ones own society can be influenced by social class. What we can discover from this reworking of the material from the Lifestyle Survey is that at least in certain areas it did uncover influences attributable to social class and background. The church however, believing that truth is not measured in numbers, does not work thus in terms of statistical significance.

What is required for the church is a different way of studying the question.

In the Lifestyle Survey we find the following passage:

> "a majority of people succeed in achieving a reasonably satisfying niche or lifestyle, but .. church membership gives some degree of immunity from sentiments of dissatisfaction. Alternatively, of course, satisfied people might be rather more likely to become church members." (p.143).

We might ask if this satisfaction is not actually the informed fatalism mentioned by Marshall et.al. and might then go on to ask if the kind of analysis carried out above does not, at the very least, provide a new slant on some of the data under consideration. What then is the status of this 'satisfaction' which is mentioned - and what significance does the 'dissatisfaction' rating above hold? What influence does expectation have on this? How do people define satisfaction and does everyone have the same definition? If there are differences, are the differences along any definable or recognizable lines or boundaries? What we can say at this stage is that it is not enough to have answers before us - there has to be an attempt to discover the reasons for the answers. This, as Marshall et.al. admit, is not easy within the parameters of a fixed-response questionnaire - it was not therefore easy in the context of the Lifestyle Survey. This study must move on to the position where we can begin to put some flesh on the bones of ideas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, can begin to look at the processes which mediate expectation and consequent satisfaction.

It may be worth while at this stage pulling together a few of our threads of suspicion. What has been said so far is that any attempt at understanding the development of liberative theology in terms of Scotland must take the following factors into account:

- the factor of power at work in any enterprise which involves understanding,
- the continuing importance of social class,
- the realistic possibility of class influence on church life and faith,
- the importance all this has for an understanding of local theology.

What local, contextualized theology has demonstrated in Latin America is its ability to upset the official organisation of the church through its combination of alternative bible reading and the consequent challenge to established power structures - and we should not underestimate its ability to do the same here. What, therefore, this study attempts to achieve is an analysis of the way ordinary church members think which will allow us to look at ideas such as hegemony and dominant ideology, oppression and class-consciousness, and use them as tools for mission and service rather than flee from their very sound. What follows, then, is a description of the research project on which this thesis was built -its design (chapter two) and its results (chapters three to eight). Following conclusions concerning hermeneutics (chapter nine) and those which tie in with the sociological theories

of Gramsci and Parkin (chapter ten), recommendations will be examined which tie what has been said into the mission of the church (chapter eleven).

Much of the inspiration for the form which the research project took came from the work of Paolo Freire, Carlos Mesters and Ernesto Cardenal. It is their affirmation that, given the opportunity, people have the ability to enter into discussion which draws out meaning from biblical passages. What the research sought to establish was the degree of difference which was to be found between the biblical interpretations of different church groups. This search was undertaken in the belief that it would have implications for the mission of the church and how that was to be understood. If it is true that there are available to communities interpretations which make more or less sense depending on their nature and social location, then it will be the task of the church's mission to elicit these and to develop them into local theologies of the kind which will act as a counterbalance to the interpretations of the powerful.

METHODOLOGY

In Martin Bulmer's Working Class Images of Society (1975) he explores briefly the kind of research which needs to be undertaken within the field of sociology but which has received only sporadic attention. This, he says, concerns a kind of cognitive anthropology,

> "in which a serious attempt is made to appreciate the meanings which the members of a particular culture hold about the world, and the ways in which they interpret the social experiences in which they are

involved," (Bulmer, 1975, p.166).

His immediate concern at this juncture is with the ways in which language may control or influence our understanding by limiting our range of interpretative categories. He argues, however, that the important point here is one of methodology rather than of drawing fine distinctions between different kinds of research. The type of interview is what he sees as the key to being able to draw out different pieces of information. He quotes the examples of Bott (1957), expressing surprise that this kind of conversational interviewing has not been more widely used, and of Lane (1962) whose sample contained only 15 respondents. The use by Jones (1941) of stories or written material to elicit response and the use by Cohen and Taylor (1972) of literary identification are also mentioned - as is the possibility of group interviewing where the presence of the sociologist need not be so obtrusive as in a one-to-one interview. Most of these approaches, he says,

> "are of an intensive and qualitative kind, and necessarily involve a loss of representativeness, a criterion which should not necessarily override all others in the design of sociological research," (Bulmer, 1975, p.169).

Bulmer's writing was incorporated into this thesis after the original aims were set out - such a contribution from the field of straight sociological enquiry was a confirmation of the aims and indeed the method of the project.

A further confirmation came from Janet Finch's article,

"The Vignette Technique in Survey Research" (February, 1987). This article discusses, "the potential of the technique for eliciting survey data of a normative kind." (Sociology, February 1987, p.105) It is, she says, concerned with beliefs and norms and thus Finch's contribution to the debate is concerned with the same kind of area identified by Bulmer - an area where qualitative research must come into its own and where the representative strictures of quantitative research must necessarily be set aside. Survey techniques, the article maintains, have always struggled to study values in a convincing way. Vignette technique moves away from direct questionning and even away from the posing of set attitude possibilities toward an attempt where,

> "the respondent is being asked to make normative statements about a set of social circumstances, rather than to express his or her 'beliefs' or 'values' in a vacuum. It is a method which, in other words, acknowledges that meanings are social and that morality may well be situationally specific," (Sociology, February 1987, pp.105f.).

Finch shares with Bulmer an acknowledgement of the importance of interpretation. While Bulmer's concern is that a way should be found of testing one person's interpretation against another, Finch's concern is to have material which it is possible to interpret at all. In this sense, of course, Finch's concern is prior to that of Bulmer. Part of the problem of interpretation identified by Finch is the sheer complexity of real life. She claims for her technique that vignettes, "offer the opportunity to explore normative issues in a way which approximates to the

complexities with which such issues are surrounded in reality," (Sociology, February 1987, p.111). It allows, she says, an assumption of the equivalence of answers and an ability to generalise from those answers received. Finch does not actually separate herself entirely from survey techniques - vignettes being a method of conducting a survey rather than an alternative to it - but this methodology nevertheless does provide various pointers to the kind of direction indicated by Bulmer in his advocacy of qualitative research. In addition, both point to a similar danger. Bulmer warns of confusing class images with class consciousness (which, he says, is more the concern of Parkin - we shall see later if this is quite the distinction he seeks to argue it is) while Finch warns that a very large chasm exists between belief and action - one which the technique she describes does not seek to cross. It will be our concern later to suggest the same kind of limitations for the present study to which we must now turn.

The outline above of the points made by Bulmer and by Finch is important as providing the research background against which to place the methodology used in the project reported on in the next chapters. This involved the use of work with groups rather than interviews with individuals, and it involved the use of texts (both biblical and other) which sought to elicit response. This therefore takes us into the kind of area to which Bulmer was referring when he

talked both of work with groups and of conversational techniques in which the qualitative is more important than the quantitative (with its insistence on representativeness). Additionally, the quotations used in each study sought to produce approval or condemnation (or some part of the range of nuances between the two) and thus the method has something in common with the vignette technique outlined by Finch. Of course what is reported here is not completely comparable with any of the above but neither should it be thought of as being without some kind of precedent.

Before describing the research in detail, let me first outline again the questions it sought to explore and the problem it sought to address. The questions with which the research concerned itself were questions about the influence of social background or class upon the belief and biblical interpretation of members of the Church of Scotland. This was done in the full knowledge that there is a basic problem of the status of any notion of class at all in modern society. Particularly there was the problem, as described in chapter one, of the disavowal of any influence from social class in the Lifestyle Survey - as John Harvey says in Bridging the Gap (1987, p.40f.), the church in general has a very real problem when discussing any idea of class - it is thought to be divisive and essentially unChristian. Any direct questionning, therefore, on the subject of class was thought to be likely

to be unproductive and the alternative approach was formulated by which those participating would be asked to discuss matters on which a class divide might be likely to appear. By avoiding, at least in the main, direct questions on the subject of class, the accusations levelled at Marshall et.al. by Peter Saunders (as discussed in the first chapter) concerning their questionnaire methodology should have been avoided. Whether or not his other main point (which concerned the deliberate fitting of evidence into a predetermined ideological schema) has been met must be judged by later chapters. Thus the research set out to examine the way in which church members (meeting as church members and not as isolated individuals) read the bible and what effect their social background has on this. It set out to do this by way of a mixture of vignette and conversation techniques but in a group setting.

Again as set out in the first chapter, the most pointed theological use of notions of class is provided today by liberation theology in general and Latin American theology in particular. Because of this the majority of quotations used came from these theologians - the aim being to draw out whether or not participants saw their forms of interpretation as being relevant and valid or foreign and mistaken. The studies are all set out later but it might be worth here going through the process by which they were created and explaining for some of them the reasoning behind the choice both of biblical passage and the

quotations used as commentary upon it.

BIBLICAL TEXTS IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Any biblical exploration in this kind of area of enquiry must start with the notion of God's bias to the poor. It is the cornerstone in many ways of all liberation theology and therefore, if the tenets of liberation theology are to be tested in any group, that is where the group has to start. Because of this, the studies began with the passage which states Jesus' adoption of the Old Testament description of the messianic task - that of bringing good news to the poor. It was essential at the beginning of such a series that some attempt be made to discover how participants viewed poverty and how they thought it was viewed by the bible. Poverty and suffering are often viewed together in the bible and so the second study moved on to suffering in an attempt to see if any differences arose between how people saw the two, whether they saw them as linked, as separate, as applying to the same or to different people. Do they refer to the same processes at work or are they quite distinct? From the point of view of liberation theology and of moving this analysis on to a more pointed look at the processes which might be seen as lying behind both poverty and suffering, it was important that the third study looked at oppression - at the idea that both poverty and suffering are caused by identifiable structures and perhaps even by identifiable people. For

both the second and the third studies we used texts taken from the Old Testament (as, in a way, was the first - most of Luke's text there being quotation from Isaiah). The second study was centred around probably the most famous biblical passage concerning suffering - the so-called Fourth Servant Song from Isaiah. The third was a little more obscure being taken from the prophecies of Ezekiel (whose only lastingly memorable passage for most people seems to be that about the valley of dry bones). The passage we studied, however, concerned the proliferation and universality of oppression - where nobody escapes condemnation.

The fourth study moved on to rather different ground. If the first three were about problems, or possibly about one problem in different guises, the fourth was about an idea of a solution - that of liberation. Here, of course, we were right into the middle of liberation theology and we used its favourite text - the exodus. We had never been far away but by now it was necessary to confront liberation theology's way of thinking and the possibility that while people can agree on the problems they are much more likely to fall out over the solutions. This was even more likely to be the case with study five where the suggested solution was 'sharpened' to the notion of judgement - with the rich as the villains of the piece. Here it was obvious that what was being suggested in this whole approach to the bible and its applicability to the modern day and our

modern society was not a traditional 'liberal' approach but a radical, political and potentially divisive approach which took seriously the possibility of division into the sheep and the goats (the passage used from Matthew).

We completed our series of studies by looking at worship and how all that had been discussed fitted in (or did not) to our experience of public worship - the place where most church members find their faith at its most focussed. We did this by looking at Luke's 'Magnificat', a text again very popular in liberation theology. In the process (and it was intended to be a process) of the six studies we had covered some very contentious ground - ground which ought to have drawn out those points at which people felt threatened, angry or encouraged by what they had read and thought about. In that process any latent or unrecognized class interests ought to have surfaced. The claim on the part of liberation theology that the poor have an epistemological privilege should also have been tested. [This claim is that only those on the underside of a society truly understand how it works and only those on the underside of history truly understand how that works. Thus if our faith is an historical faith then the ability to understand history is essential for its understanding and those on the underside (the poor) have just the epistemological privilege which is claimed for them, understanding being the position where one stands under and not on top.]

SECONDARY QUOTATIONS

The next step, therefore, is to look at the various interpretative texts used in the studies and at how they fitted in with the biblical passages around which they were gathered. As has already been noted, many of these quotations came from recognized representatives of the theology of liberation but to these were added theologians who are not thus categorized and also non-theologians such as politicians, sociologists, philosophers and others whose words could help shed light on a passage or point up some particular facet which might otherwise have slipped by unnoticed.

The first study sought to set the scene for the others and therefore concentrated on interpretations of poverty and those who suffer from it. The intention here, as in every study, was to look at the attitudes people had to the question in hand firstly in that questions own terms and secondly in terms which related the topic to the church and its life and witness. Thus the concern here was to see how people defined poverty - thereby seeing how they defined 'good news to the poor' in Luke, how people understood the causes of poverty and how they saw the relationship (if at all) between this and the church. The results of such an investigation would then be analyzed to see where similarities and differences lay and what might be inferred about the reasons for these. The task, therefore, in preparing the study was to find a range of possibilities,

a variety of interpretations, which might point up the similarities and differences by providing participants with opinions with which to identify. The same task was faced in subsequent studies.

At the same time, however, it had to be borne in mind that the project aimed to elicit opinions on some quite specific interpretations and theological positions. Because of this there was always going to be an imbalanced number of quotations from writers in liberation theology since part of the thesis which was being tested here was that liberation theology and its arguments and interpretations would be more acceptable to those whose social standing and background was, in the terms outlined above, on the underside. This would say two things if correct - one, that there is a relationship between biblical interpretation and social class; and two, that liberation theology can be made relevant even in a relatively affluent society such as our own because even here there are establishable differences in life-style and expectation. From here it would be possible to argue that liberation theology does not address the situation only of absolute and extreme poverty but applies just as well to situations of relative poverty and affluence. The claim to cultural specificity often made in reference to liberation theology would thus be undermined.

In the first study, therefore, Gutierrez, Hanks, Freire,

Cardenal, Boff and Sobrino are all quoted. In the second, Alves and Miranda are added and, in the third, Tamez, Boesak and Desmond. By the time the fourth study is reached, the influence of liberation theology has grown as the process has moved more toward asking people to react directly to the liberationist perspective. Here Balasuriya, Pixley and Tutu have been added. In addition to those who can directly be described as liberation theologians, others are used (such as Wallis and Moltmann) who can broadly be seen as being in sympathy with a general liberationist position - indeed Moltmann can claim to having inspired some of the thinking in Latin American theology, especially the writing of Alves and Sobrino. Because the fourth study is so heavily weighted toward liberation theology, the fifth 'eases off', so to speak, and brings in other voices without taking away from the general thrust of the project. This was to allow participants to distance themselves, if they wished, from liberationist thinking and prevent them from feeling obliged to accept its general principles through sheer weight of material. In the final study, many of the liberationist writers reappeared, with one or two being added - Santa Ana, Galilea, Torres.

It can be seen, therefore, that while a definite theme ran through the studies (for a specific reason) it was possible for the logic of the argument contained therein to be resisted and for a contrary stance to be maintained. At

all times those taking part were invited to put the biblical passage alongside the comments of the writers and to put both alongside their own experience. The thesis here would argue that the sense which the comments were seen to make would depend on exactly that experience, that support would be found for Finch's claim that values are situationally specific - and so are theology and biblical interpretation. Thus there will be, for some, positions which make no sense whatsoever - that are nonsense. The extent to which one group whose experience leaves them in this position manages to persuade another group (whose experience might in fact leave them more amenable) to adopt the first group's judgement, will be the extent to which a dominant ideology thesis is applicable.

THE SAMPLE

Those who participated in the project were drawn from three Church of Scotland congregations in Edinburgh. One of these was one which probably epitomises the view of Edinburgh from the outside. It was situated in a very prosperous area of traditional stone-built, owner-occupied housing - an active, large and generous congregation in the kind of area where the church is traditionally strong and well supported. The other two were in large council estates on the city's edge where the church has, at least in recent time, struggled. Both have large parishes but

relatively small congregations and similar levels of giving (roughly one third the amount per person per week given in the first congregation) which reflect the low level of average income in the two areas. The first congregation and one of the others had well-established housegroups and discussion fora whereas the other did not. In this congregation and in the first the groups met on church premises while in the other the group met in the home of two of the participants. All three groups had a regular 'core' with one or two others whose attendance was much more intermittent - most of the comments and analysis, therefore, concerns the core group in each case (four people in each of two congregations, three in the other). What was surprising, however, was the extent to which the occasional change of membership made no difference to the overall mood and direction of the groups' comments - this would be to the consternation of the members from the first congregation who reacted quite negatively to any suggestion that an analysis could be made of comments made by groups rather than purely those of the individuals within them.

Group A:

This is in one of the council estates. This group had three regular members, met in the church session room, and was in the congregation which had no real tradition of meetings of this kind.

Mr.A. is retired having previously worked in transport

with one of the local bus companies. He is a very active elder who was formerly in the army for twelve years. He has been a church member for fifty years, thirty-nine of those in his present congregation. His parents were tailors, he is married and has one grown-up son.

Mrs.B. is a part-time secretary. She is a native of Edinburgh, though not of this part of the city. She is the daughter of a railway guard and the mother of two grown-up daughters. She has been a member of the church for fifty-four years and in this congregation for twenty-six. She lived for a while in London. She too is an elder.

Mr.C. is not actually a member of this congregation, being seconded from another congregation to assist in this. He therefore brings a slightly different view to the discussions and it will be an interesting part of the analysis later to see how and to what extent this difference makes itself manifest. He is a retired investment manager whose father worked for customs and excise. He has two grown-up children and has been a church member for fifty-six years most of those years being in various Edinburgh churches.

Group B:

This is the group in the more affluent area of the city.

This congregation is well used to discussion groups and met in the session room in the church. There were four regular members.

Mrs.D. is a retired teacher who was married to a missionary. Her parents were both doctors. She has been a church member for sixty-four years, twenty of them in her present congregation. She has four grown-up children.

Mrs.E. is an information scientist whose father was a butcher and who lived for some time in Germany and in England. She has been a member of the church for forty-three years, twenty-four of them in her present congregation.

Mr.F. is retired, having previously been a chartered gas engineer. His father was also an engineer. He has two grown-up children. He has been a church member for forty years and has been in this congregation for twenty-eight.

Mr.G. is a mechanical engineer in his forties (making him by far the youngest of any mentioned so far). He went to an English public school and to Oxford University - all others mentioned so far have been educated in the state sector. His father was also a mechanical engineer. He has been a member of the

church for twenty-five years and his current congregation for sixteen. He has four school-age children.

Group C:

This group comes from a congregation in a council estate which has received much media and other attention in the recent past and has been the object of various improvement schemes - much of it an attempt at gentrification. The members were mostly well-used to discussion groups and the group met in the home of two sisters who were members. This is in fact the group which had the largest amount of changing composition with several people appearing for only one or two meetings. This never seemed to be a disruptive feature, however, and the four members who are described below were all very regular attenders who formed the core of all meetings. This group was unusual also in the number of younger people who attended (ie. under 40) although only one of these, as will be seen below, was part of the core of regular attenders.

Mr.H. is a chartered accountant and fills the same kind of position, though not for the same reason, that Mr.C. fills in Group A.. He attended one of Edinburgh's merchant schools and in his twenty-four years of church membership has moved around various congregations in Edinburgh having, at the time of the meetings, been a member in his present congregation

for only six months. He has three grown-up children. His father was a bar manager and his mother a shop assistant.

Miss J. is retired from work with the fire brigade. Her father was a boilermaker and she has lived all her life in Edinburgh, spending all her thirty-seven years of church membership in the same congregation.

Miss K. is the sister of Miss J. and is retired from working in shops. She too, like her sister, has lived all her life in Edinburgh and joined the church at the same time and in the same place as her sister.

Mrs.L. grew up and still lives in the one area of Edinburgh. She is a housewife and mother in her thirties with two pre-school children. She comes from a large family and her father was a gardener. She is the youngest of any of the people described here and by far the most recent church member having had a recent and obviously meaningful conversion.

At the end of the six studies, these eleven people were asked to complete a short questionnaire about how they felt about the series of studies. Of the eleven, nine replied which represented 100% response from groups B and C but only one of the three in group A. This follow-up questionnaire was aimed at eliciting an impression of how

the studies had been received and at building a snap-shot picture of the views of the participants. Firstly, it is interesting to note the overall emphases received from the groups. The impression of almost everyone was that the group in which they participated was in agreement on most things, that everyone in the group had participated equally and that they themselves had said all that they wanted to say at the time (although some inevitably thought afterwards about other things they wish they had said). General impressions of the studies as a whole were positive although at times too controversial for those, as it was put, "still young in the faith."

It is when we turn to particular responses which can be gathered together, however, that pointers are seen to be present for what will emerge in later chapters: the most notable of these is that when given a list (poverty, suffering, oppression, power, wealth, conflict) and asked if their understanding of any of those was helped by the bible, the greatest number chose suffering. We will see later how important suffering and our response to it became in this study. Despite that, however, only one person chose the Fourth Servant Song as the study they had enjoyed best - though perhaps 'enjoy' was the wrong word to use in such a context! There was as much agreement on the passage which had been the most difficult, which was Ezekiel 22:23-31. Reasons given for the difficulty ranged from a generalized difficulty with the Old Testament, through

difficulty with language concerning the wrath of God, to confessions of a lack of understanding of oppression which was felt as a barrier to understanding the passage. (It will be interesting to contrast this reason for difficulty with the comments coming from the same people later that understanding does not after all depend on experience.)

The questionnaire also asked about three influences: the influence of faith on life; the influence of life on faith; and, more specifically, the influence of social class on understanding of the matters listed above (poverty, suffering...). The choice was given of making the following responses: 'a great deal', 'a certain amount', 'a little', 'not at all'. Most thought that lives were affected by faith 'a great deal', and that faith was affected by life (defined as "upbringing, life experience, education, social position") also 'a great deal'. Despite this last answer, however, when asked about the influence specifically of social class, most responses went down one on the scale to 'a certain amount' with only one favouring 'a great deal'. This seems to confirm what John Harvey and the Lifestyle Survey had to say about the perceived influence of class in the church - we have seen, however, and will see further that perception need not always be an accurate mirror of reality.

Respondents were asked a more open-ended question about their favourite bible passages which also asked for the

reasons for the choice. As might have been expected, there were no 'repeats' save for 1 Corinthians 13 which occurred twice, once at the end of a long list. Indeed only one book (Ephesians) received more than one mention. And of course no-one chose any of the passages which had gone into the formation of the study project. More interesting, perhaps, than simply a list of these passages is a look at the reasons given for choosing them:

Ephesians 2:8-9

"it gives me hope and confidence that God chose me of his own will" (Mrs.L.)

John 21

"it was Jesus final test to his disciples, he was making sure that they would be true to his teachings" (Miss K.)

Ephesians 4:1-16

"we should never take our gifts for granted and should be willing to share them and grow with them, hoping that this was what the Lord intended" (Miss J.)

1 Corinthians 13

"an ideal to aim for" (Mr.G.)

Romans 8:31-39

"because of its overwhelming assertion of God's love and care no matter what happens to us" (Mrs.D.)

Mark 16

"it proclaims the resurrection, the forgiveness of Peter, the gospel for the whole world, and the promise of strength for the task." (Mrs.E.)

The interest in these reasons lies in the fact that none of the ideas form part of the matrix of thought which goes to make up liberation theology - on which so much of this project is based. Work is therefore being carried out with people who do not list liberation, or justice, or God's particular love for the poor, or division among their priorities in biblical interpretation. It can therefore, I hope, be safely asserted that this is as reasonable a cross section of members of the Church of Scotland as could be grouped within such a small sample. They were certainly not chosen because of their familiarity with or sympathy for the kind of material with which they were presented.

THE MEETINGS

The meetings of the different groups were conducted in as informal an atmosphere as possible. We began by reading the biblical passage out loud and then proceeded to look at the various quotations which, it was hoped would cast light on the passage or on the issue which it addressed. The degree to which I intervened depended on how much effort was required to get the discussion going or on how much was required to prevent discussion wandering too far. Because of the informal setting, necessary to encourage people to talk, it could not be said that the different groups always covered exactly the same ground. And even when the same ground was being covered, the questions I asked in order to cover it varied from place to place since it often seemed best to phrase a question differently in different places.

In the accounts of all the discussions, however, it will be seen that a great deal was indeed common to all the groups - and certainly enough to provide plenty of material for contrast and comparison. All the meetings were recorded on audio tape and one, by way of example, is set out verbatim in an appendix.

The aim of this kind of method in the meetings was to put on a par those with widely varying levels of educational attainment and social background. Such a levelling process was entirely necessary in what was an entirely cerebral activity. Without the informality, without the provision of material to agree with or react against, without it being conducted verbally, without the group setting, those from what Parkin describes as the subordinate class and those with less formal education would have been much less likely to be able to put across what they meant to say or, indeed, to take part at all. The use of this kind of research method appears to me, therefore, to answer many of the points Bulmer was making. The claims of quantitative reasearch over qualitative have been that the former has a much greater claim to scientific validity - it is more representative and therefore conclusions of a more general nature can be more safely drawn - hence the Lifestyle Survey and the work of Marshall and his colleagues. Even there, however, it has been shown that the art of interpretation must still be practised after the science of the collection of data has been accomplished. What I hope

that this project shows is that scientific validity and human validity are not necessarily the same thing. Scientific validity and the accompanying survey techniques allow for few of the ifs and buts and nuances of everyday life and therefore the results thus obtained tend to be crude and one dimensional. Only when people are allowed the space to develop thoughts, explore questions, admit doubts, argue their point and see another's point of view is it possible to develop a more human perspective. What will be shown later on is that only when issues become reasonably sharply focussed is it possible for some to go against the accepted grain. Such focussing, I would want to argue, is only possible in the kind of setting which this project sought to establish.

This way of working was a risk - it was new and untried. It is my belief, however, that the results obtained were worthwhile and that therefore the method worked. Chapter one ended by suggesting that a new method was required to reach into the kind of territory where the Lifestyle Survey could not go. This project was only its beginning. The following chapters recount some of its successes and one or two of its failures. What it leads to is the suggestion that there is a need for more - a further stage, which is where we finish in chapter eleven.

CHAPTER THREE: STUDY ONE - POVERTY

Study One - Luke 4:16-21

"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"."

1. Who are the poor?

(i) the poor are not poor

"Not only are the poor not getting poorer, they are better off than they have ever been." (John Moore, government minister: public speech, May 1989)

(ii) the poor are short of material goods

"[those whose] total earnings are insufficient to obtain the minimum necessaries for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency" (Rowntree, 1901: in McGregor, 1981, p.66)
"'The poor' refers first of all to those who live in a social situation characterized by a lack of the goods of this world and even by misery and indigence." (Gutierrez, 1974, p.298)
"People who did not own land and enjoy its productivity were in a very precarious economic situation. These were the poor." (Hoppe, 1987, p.5)

(iii) the poor are losers and victims

"Poverty is a class thing, closely linked to a general situation of class inequality." (Miliband, 1974: in McGregor, 1981, p.79)
"The poor are those who are unable to defend themselves" (Limburg, 1977: in Weir, 1988, p.13f.)

(iv) the poor are those who have less

"Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong." (Townsend, 1979: in McGregor, 1981, p.74)

(v) the poor are those with a special relationship with God

"any within the community who lack physical means and who, regardless of any moral or spiritual qualities, receive God's protection as it is expressed through the community's care" (Gillingham, 1988, p.15f.)

"By the time Jesus used [the phrase 'the poor'], it denoted not only a physical situation but a spiritual attitude. This is only natural since those who are materially indigent and physically oppressed are also likely to be poor in spirit; that is, to look to God for succor." Scott, 1980, p.87)

2. What causes poverty?

(i) oppression

"Jesus describes the poor as 'oppressed'. Thus he singles out the primary cause of poverty according to the Bible." (Hanks, 1983, p.111)

(ii) powerlessness

"In the complexity of bureaucratic society [poor people] have little power to make demands, either individually or collectively. They lose out continually, suffer frustrations, take knocks and blows which damage self-esteem and dignity and further reduce their freedom of choice." (McGregor, 1981, p.43)

(iii) inequality

poverty cannot be viewed apart from inequality otherwise it will be seen as a problem only for the poor" (McGregore, 1981, p,77f., paraphrase)

"the Right wing claim that inequality is a good thing, for differential rewards act as incentives encouraging the acquisition of skills, hard work and risk-taking, on which everyone's prosperity depends." (McGregor, 1981, p.79)

(iv) improvidence?

"The suggestion that poverty is largely the fault of the individual is an excellent excuse

for inaction and one all too readily accepted. The evidence, however, indicates that the extent of improvidence is far too samall to be considered as a significant factor in the explanation of the extent of poverty in Britain today." (Church of Scotland, Reports to the General Assembly, 1971, p.137)

3. What about the church?

(i) the poor are outside the church

"From the eighteenth century, and progressively through the nineteenth, since the emergence of the industrial towns, the working classes, the labouring poor, the artisan class, as a class and as adults, have been outside the churches." (Wickham, 1957, p.215)

"The church is to be the place where signs of God's kingdom can be seen, and where there are flickers of hope. The poor have a deep instinct that Jesus is on their side, but they are not so sure about the church." (Sheppard, 1983, p.200)

(ii) the place of the church is with the poor

"Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral." (Freire, 1973: in Kee, 1974, p.100)

"As the followers of Christ that we are trying to be, we cannot fail to show our solidarity with the suffering - the imprisoned, the marginalized, the persecuted - for Christ identifies himself with them. We once again assure the people of our support and our service in the fulfillment of our specific mission as preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ who came to proclaim the good news to the poor and freedom to the oppressed." (Bishops and priests of Machala, Ecuador, 1977: in Gutierrez, 1984, p.100)

"The Church with its Gospel is called to give to areas of deprivation and disadvantage a sense of community, to family life a new vitality, and to the individual a new sense of responsibility. It can, in essence, become the heart of the community stimulating it to a new kind of life and serving it in the Name of Christ." (Church of Scotland, Reports to the General Assembly, 1976, p.101)

(iii) the poor are the real church

"The good news is for the poor, and the only ones who can understand it and comment on it are the poor people, not the great theologians. And its the poor who are called to announce the news, as Jesus announced it." (Cardenal, 1977, p.133)

"according to Luke, Jesus wishes to emphasize that the gospel and the kingdom of God have first of all to do with the poor" (Hanks, 1983, p.112)

"The sign that the kingdom of God approaches and begins to abide in our cities is that the poor have justice done to them" (L.Boff, 1985, p.25)

The first of the studies, based on Luke 4.16-21, involved groups from the following churches:

the pilot group:	5	members,
Group A:	4	" ,
Group B:	4	" ,
Group C:	6	" .

This study was concerned to accomplish the following tasks:

a) to introduce group members to the style of working - this involved my taking a greater role in the discussion than it was my intention to do thereafter; it also involved the deliberate choice of subject matter which would be easily accessible to most participants and on which it might reasonably be assumed that all would have a point of view;

b) to examine the views of participants concerning poverty and how they linked their views on that subject with their church membership and with their reading of the bible.

The sources of the various viewpoints presented in the study ranged from theology and biblical studies to sociology, social policy, economics and politics; there was, however, the bias which will be repeated in the other studies toward contributions from liberation theology.

These various viewpoints were centred around three questions: who are the poor? what causes poverty? what about the church? (There were actually two other questions originally in the study - both were used with the pilot group and one was used with Group B - but they were dropped from consideration at this point because the phrase with which they were concerned, "the day of the Lord's favour," was too obscure to be tackled at this early stage in the study programme.) What follows is, therefore, an account of the three remaining questions in order - taking the responses of the different groups first alone and then together in an attempt to draw out some preliminary comparisons.

Group A:

This was the only group which insisted right from the beginning that 'the poor' in the passage from Luke had absolutely nothing to do with material poverty. This meant that in this group, unlike in the others, subsequent discussion proceeded along two parallel tracks which rarely, if ever, met: one track was that of discussing the passage and the other was that of discussing material poverty in the world today. The group was by far the most reluctant to make a connection between the two.

For this reason the group moved first in the discussion of question one, "who are the poor," to answer five, "the poor are those with a special relationship with God," and within

this to the quotation from Waldron Scott. Waldron Scott, however, is not discounting physical poverty but rather conjoining it with spiritual poverty. This was not how the group saw it. He is stating that those who are, "materially indigent and physically oppressed are also likely to be poor in spirit," but this group (and, as far as could be ascertained, the whole group) put the special relationship with God as the reason for being accorded the title 'poor' in the terms of this passage. Part of the 'problem' here was the use of the term 'spiritual poverty'. In common usage 'poverty' indicates a lack of something and therefore, in this context, it most obviously implies a lack of 'spirituality' - in this light, therefore, the phrase 'spiritual poverty' will be regarded in a negative way. In fact, of course, Scott and others intend to give the phrase a positive connotation which will indicate a turning <u>to</u> God rather than what was being presumed in the discussion under review, a turning <u>from</u> God. We have here, therefore, two fundamental divides: the first is that of the priority of poverty over nearness to God versus the priority of nearness to God over poverty - in the sense, that is, of which designation comes chronologically before the other; the second is that of whether we allow a positive or a negative value to be given to spiritual poverty - which may be translated into a discussion of whether we see the Christian faith in terms of plenitude or kenosis.

Having said all that, the discussion moved over to its parallel track and looked at what we might mean by poverty in material and societal terms. General approval was given to the statement from Townsend which identifies poverty as being primarily a relative term. There was a sense, however, in which this agreement with Townsend succeeded not only in relativising poverty but also in relativising the problem of poverty - this is, of course, the danger for which Townsend has been criticised by, among others, MacGregor. Disagreement was expressed with the statement from John Moore (as in every other group). Miliband's statement about the relationship between poverty and class received some brief attention but the disagreements within the group on this subject came out much more in discussion of question two, to which I now turn.

Within discussion of question two most time was spent on the questions of improvidence and inequality. Thomas Hanks' claim that the bible puts oppression as the primary cause of poverty was unable to claim any attention (and I did not push those claims as there will be ample opportunity for this discussion in Study Three). In fact, the whole discussion of "What causes poverty?" circled around ideas of inequality and for that reason, at least indirectly, around perceptions regarding the importance or otherwise of 'class'. The statement was made that poverty in particular and position in society in general depended in large measure on where an individual starts - such a

statement would seem to contradict those who regard class as being of no contemporary importance. It was made, however, by someone who, I suspect tried and failed to rise through the ranks (at least to any significant degree). This was opposed by the elder 'on loan' from another church who thus, and really for the first time, displayed what might in advance have been expected to be a view different from the rest of the group due to a much more middle-class background. He argued that it was possible to rise through society's strata (and by admitting their existence began to undermine his own case) and, indeed, that it was also possible to fall through them as well.

It would, however, be quite inaccurate to leave the impression of an elder from another church who brought more conservative views in from a more middle class environment. When it came to discussing improvidence it was this same man who defended young people who leave home and end up sleeping in cardboard boxes on the streets of our cities. His argument here concerned the homes they were leaving - the conditions and the people in them. Opposed to this view was that which saw young people in this position as having brought it on themselves. It is interesting at this point to note that this view clearly supports the notion of improvidence as being at least a reason for poverty but that when asked directly to comment on the quotation from the Church and Nation committee the group had produced no opposition to its declared disagreement with this as a

relevant explanation. This must surely tell us something about the 'authority' of the written word and of given, official ideas which succeed in carrying the kind of weight which brooks no opposition only while discussion remains at the level of abstract theory - as soon as concrete examples are introduced and the level of abstraction lowered, official pronouncements become much more vulnerable to alternative definitions of reality.

When this group came to discuss question three - which is where the church is brought into the picture, by far the greatest amount of time was spent on answer one. The absence of poor people from the life of the church was a very real part of their experience. Every member of the group is an elder and each had stories to tell of attempts to reach people in their neighbourhood and of the general failure of such attempts. They concurred in a way which surprised me (given earlier responses) with both Wickham and Sheppard. My surprise, however, was due to my own predeliction for ideological consistency which itself is capable of forgetting the central idea behind this whole study - that experience is prior to, and quite capable of overriding, ideas.

For this same reason of the importance of the primacy of experience, the group had much more difficulty in discussing the rest of the question. The elder from the other church, who had previously and for a much longer

period of time been an elder in a large city centre church, was of the opinion that not only does the church in this country not side with the powerless, it is made up in large measure of the powerful! For the most part, however, the group clearly felt the conflict between the powerful and the powerless to be beyond its ken. Answer three received short shrift! The quotation from Cardenal was accepted in the terms set out at the beginning of the session - that the poor being referred to were not the materially poor at all. And the approach being advocated by Hanks and Boff which involves seeing the treatment of the materially poor as a yardstick or thermometer of how we are approaching the kingdom of God was rejected outright.

The pilot group:

This group was the group which acted as guinea pigs for the method being used in these studies and is therefore not part of the ongoing programme of research. It did, however, discuss exactly the same first study and it is, I feel, worth recording that discussion along with the others at this stage even though these people were not asked to look at studies two to six.

The first question produced a wide-ranging discussion in which the two quotations dismissed out of hand were those from John Moore and Ralph Miliband. Considerable time was spent on whether absolute or relative definitions of poverty were to be preferred - a research scientist who had

worked in Africa was keen to keep to an absolute level (people who were cold, hungry, naked, homeless) while most others wanted to hold to the view that definitions of the poor change with time (though not denying that there are still a small number of people even in this country who are absolutely poor by any definition). Time was also spent on material and spiritual poverty - which came up again later. The housewife and the unemployed teacher were particularly keen on the idea of spiritual poverty, the latter quoting the Matthean beatitude, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'. There was also discussion on ideas of the physically poor being nearer to God with the paradox being recognized that poverty is actually something from which people are to be freed - it is not a spiritual state to be envied. Only one new definition was offered (by the unemployed teacher), that being that the poor are those who lack hope.

When we went on to discuss the causes of poverty, there was no-one willing to include improvidence as a significant factor - everyone agreed with the 'Church and Nation' report quoted. Most comments revolved around notions of inequality (this despite the rejection of ideas of class previously). Thus mention was made of greed, of wastage, of extravagant styles of life, of tax-evasion, of butter mountains. Only the person with experience of the Third World argued that the problem was not simply one of distribution but rather it concerned the limited nature of the 'cake' of resources. Most, however, said that at

international, national and local level, a more equitable sharing, a concern for the neighbour, could tackle much of what we see as the problem of poverty. Little use was made of the concept of oppression (save, again, from experience of Africa where biblical comments on the subject were eagerly received and readily understood); nor was much said of powerlessness. Despite some discussion of power, what came across was that no-one in the group had any real grasp of how power was appropriated and used. Although the importance of collectivity was mentioned by the research scientist and the power of money by a church worker, neither of these ideas was given a coherent shape by the discussion which followed - thus they tended to be talked of as truisms rather than as cogent theories.

Question three took the discussion on to the relationship between the church and the poor. Some suggested that the poor felt they had no place in the church and others mentioned that there had been times and places where this was not so - as in the Welsh revivals. The question was raised, however, about the definition of 'the church' which is, in fact, one which Latin American theologians themselves have found to be inextricably bound up with this kind of discussion. As we moved on, though, it became clear that all in the group were much happier with the idea that 'the place of the church is with the poor' than they were with saying that 'the poor are the real church'. This latter statement was described as being 'overstated'.

While the group was quite happy to say things like, "the churches should be doing something about the poor," and even to say that that something could and should be on the level of structural change and political activism, it was quite unwilling to accept the notion that the only ones who can understand the good news are the poor. The good news is for everybody, they said; the good news is new life not in this world; enslavement is not just physical and neither is liberation. They were, perhaps, insisting on what Rostagno says is illegitimate - an inter-class reading of the bible. Even a group which comprised many untypical church members in terms of their experience and their commitment to a view of justice which has sound biblical roots could not escape what the Kairos Document has called 'church theology'.

Group B:

As in other groups, the quotation from John Moore was immediately dismissed but the discussion of that immediately moved to where the poor are to whom he was referring - thus moving the group quickly to ideas of relative poverty. The difficulties of any 'absolute' definition (as in Rowntree) were well explored. This led to the opinion that in this country there are no longer any really poor people in that sense (so what of the dismissal of what Moore said?). Homelessness came into the discussion and brought out the idea of permanence or its lack - ie. if ones poverty is a temporary situation it

cannot be regarded in the same way as if there is no conceivable way out of it. (This is in many ways very similar to the point made in the pilot group that the poor are those without hope.) Attitude was identified as being an important element in poverty - examples cited were those of Jesus himself and then of a servant on a highland estate who had very little but was highly cultured and very well read; also that of someone who had of his own accord given up wealth to live in the country from the proceeds gained by his own labour. This then led to the identification of need as another important factor in describing poverty, reference being made to those with 'a low level of need'. Mother Theresa, it was said, saw a different kind of need in this country and thus identified a different, but no less real, poverty.

I moved the conversation on to the quotation from Miliband and asked about the continuing relevance of ideas of class. It was thought that class, if it did still exist, had now changed its emphasis because, "so many people are wealthy now". Class, it was also stated, is now a state of mind, an attitude of being, "a refinement of 'spirit'". This last definition was expanded in terms of seeing class as an attitude to the rest of the community, as an appreciation of different kinds of music, etc., a matter of taste - thus the gamekeeper above "was a working man but was not working-class" because of his cultured tastes and interests. The heading under which I had placed the

Miliband quotation was approved of ("The poor are losers and victims") but surprise was expressed that discussion of class should be placed in that category. People today do not suffer because of class distinctions.

We then moved on to the question of causes of poverty. The first answer which pointed us to oppression, it was suggested, referred more to the Third World than to our democracy. It was suggested then, however, that oppression in our country might be seen in terms of the second answer - the weight of bureaucracy producing powerlessness and thus oppression. Discussion moved to the workplace and the thought of oppression being the result of bosses or Trade Unions (especially the closed shop). Nothing, however, in this country could compare to the oppression of, say, Romania. Improvidence was not, the group agreed, extensive enough to be regarded as a cause of poverty. There was rather more discussion on ideas of inequality. One opinion was that inequality was inevitable and not in itself a problem - neither good nor bad, just there. More resistance was given to the thought that inequalities in incentives and rewards were necessary - this kind of thinking, prevalent today, needed to be severely circumscribed. Very little evidence can be produced to support the thinking behind it. One response to that, however, was to point to the experience of Eastern Europe where the introduction of variable rewards was now seen as essential to getting the economy moving.

When we moved on to the response of the church, the first point with which issue was taken was the equation by Wickham of the poor with the artisan class who, today, are quite well off. Criticism of Wickham then moved on to the whole idea that the poor are at all outside the church. General opinion was that in the nineteenth century, contrary to what is stated by Wickham, working class people were much more in evidence in churches than they are today (historical fact may be more on the side of Wickham). The case of Greenock in the 1950's was cited where, at least at the Gaelic church where one of the group had been a member, those who attended came from all walks of life. Discussion then moved on to decline in church attendance in general and to the influence of the growth of leisure activities (such as golf clubs - though I think at this point the discussion had moved a fair distance from the poor and the working class!). More to the point was the thought that the collapse of communities in the inner cities and the removal of people to the vast peripheral housing schemes had had a great effect on the communal life of the people and, within that, the church had declined in popularity and influence. The breaking of habits from one generation to another was regarded as crucial - the absence of one generation can be very hard to overcome and social mobility is central to this (discussion had again left the subject in hand). The point was made, which we will find being echoed in Group C, that in certain areas and workplaces and schools attendance at church brought ridicule upon the

individual concerned. It was a point, however, which not all in the group were totally willing to accept because it was not part of their own experience.

The group was generally agreed that the place of the church was with the poor - but not in any exclusive way. The church needs to be near the sinner (who could be the powerful oppressor). I quoted the situation of the South African churches and their one-sided approach to the divisions in their country. The idea of solidarity with the poor was explored a little and not confined to physical or geographical proximity - other, more practical, ways have to be found. Also, and here we have another echo of the discussion in the pilot group, what about the Matthaean beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit,"? The above discussion therefore precluded the answer which said that the poor are the real church. The comments returned to being concerned with the poor in spirit - and had the same problems with the phrase that Group A had. What was meant, however, was that theological thinking was detrimental (often) to spiritual life - which is why Cardenal draws the distinction between the poor and theologians. The last comments from Hanks and Boff were thought to put too much emphasis on material things in relation to the Kingdom. They were not, however, dismissed out of hand as they were in Group A - some credence being given to the idea that we can be judged by how we treat the poorest among us.

Group C:

The first quotation picked up with approval in this group was that from Gutierrez which identified poverty with a lack of goods. Another opinion was that the most appropriate was that from Townsend - his relative definition of poverty. As with other groups, the quotation from John Moore was dismissed without further consideration. Scott's comments caused their usual confusion - spiritual poverty being again interpreted negatively. What was affirmed, however, in the midst of this confusion was the spirituality and trust in God of those who have little or nothing.

The group discussed class. Some remarked on the fact that you can find poor middle-class people (thus the definition of class was not one confined simply to wealth). The continuing existence of a class structure, however, was not questioned. The class structure under dicussion, it soon became clear, was a very localised one with sub-divisions within the working class commanding the greatest attention. Within this fairly sophisticated analysis the major distinction was understood as being between those who were or had been unemployed (or had unemployment in their family) and therefore understood what it was to be without - and those who had no such experience (who were doing very nicely and had no time for those less fortunate than themselves). Attitude was thus seen as an important component of class consciousness - but with close attention

being given to what goes into the creation of those attitudes. First and foremost in this was life experience, the degree to which one had had to cope with difficulty and hardship oneself. Sympathy comes from understanding which in turn comes from personal experience. Problems arising from poverty, though perhaps not poverty itself, were seen as being exacerbated by advertising and the pressures of a consumer culture - particularly in the case of families with children.

We then moved on to the causes of poverty. The group agreed with the Church and Nation committee that improvidence was not a cause of poverty. The answer that was most eagerly taken on was that which put poverty as being rooted in powerlessness. Many in the group had obviously experienced the powerlessness of which MacGregor was talking - such as being continually retrained for new jobs but still not finding a job to match the training which had been given. Even finding a job (or in some cases being forced to take a job) was not seen as a way out of this powerlessness and frustration as the low-paid jobs available often left people worse off than they had been out of work: "They say it gives you self esteem but self esteem doesn't pay the bills." The importance of first-hand understanding was also seen as being important for politicians and civil servants. Inequality was seen in terms of 'why?' rather than in terms of 'why not?'. It moved the discussion on to questions of priorities in

society - where money goes and where it does not and why. What was being operated was a desired system of fairness and therefore a questioning of why society was unable to come up to that system. The idea of inequality as a good thing was, for the group, a very hard one with which to come to terms. Inequality was rather seen in terms of division which was, in turn, seen as being greater under present policies.

In question three, David Sheppard's point was well taken as being both a description of how things are and of how it might be regarded. The concept put forward by the Church and Nation committee of the church as the heart of the community was given a lot of consideration and much approval - much of this was related to perceptions of the church in the group's area and its history. At the same time, however, the point raised in Group B was repeated - that being a member of the church was often a cause of amazement and derision at work. Thus there was here a recognition that we exist in different communities simultaneously and that they are not all easily compatible with one another. How the church as a whole is seen in the community is centrally dependent on how the minister is regarded, it was said. This echoed a point made in Group B that the ministers could be asked to do certain things on behalf of the rest of the church - it would appear that the Church of Scotland is by no means clear of ideas of the minister as a 'vicar'. The point here, however, was that

the minister (and the church) should be and be seen to be of the people - not removed and aloof and over-formal. This was related back to the quotation from Sheppard which was taken to mean that the poor are often not made welcome in the church. Acceptance emerged from this as a prime component of the process of making the church relevant to the poor.

Part of this acceptance was seen to be the need for the church in certain working-class areas to be there for those who are most in need - although hesitation was expressed about the idea of the church 'taking sides'. As well as acceptance, though, there was identified the need for judgement and discrimination on the part of the church - it could not just be acclimatised so much to the community that it was unable to discern what was helpful and what was not. The importance of experience was again stressed by participants when coming to opinions on how the church should react to political and social situations.

Cardenal's statement that only the poor could understand the gospel was interpreted as saying that only people in poor areas where going to church is not 'the done thing' understand the call of the gospel as opposed to the call of social convention. The immediate reaction was to go along with this - it was a reaction which was later modified lest they were being unfair to anyone, but the basic thrust of the point was still taken as being accurate. Even here,

however, the membership of a church was primarily seen in terms of attendance at public worship rather than in terms of 'the doing of righteousness' (at least in articulated thought).

DISCUSSION

In this first study certain preliminary comparisons can be drawn. The first of these is on the attitude of the different groups to the idea of class. Group C was the only group which accepted the term without equivocation while all the others had some quibble or other with the term. Even in Group C, however, and despite the context of the discussion (which was focussed on the poor) there was a quite distinct refusal to put all consideration of class into monetary terms. As was noted, Group C actually came fairly near Group B in its identification of attitude as being influential when one comes to debate in this kind of area. It should be noted, however, that the attitudes being held up as examples of what we should be looking for were, in reality, quite different: in Group B it was attitude to 'things', to learning and the like, which was predominantly under consideration although attitudes to the rest of the community did receive a brief mention; in Group C, by contrast, attitude was thought of in terms primarily of attitude to others. A second difference in a seeming similarity was in what lay behind that attitude:

in Group C there was a very definite claim being made that personal life experience, and in particular the extent to which one had personally experienced hardship, lay behind the attitudes one brought to bear; in Group B no clear articulation was forthcoming about the genesis of the attitudes which determined class - one could perhaps speculate that, had such an articulation come, it would have been in terms of family background and education.

Group A was another matter entirely. Their parish is very large and contains a predominantly working class population. The group of elders with which I am working, however, is probably best described as, with the exception of the elder "on loan" from the other church, lower middle class. Whether this describes or accounts for the difference between them and Group C remains to be seen. On class, however, as on various other topics, their views do indeed diverge remarkably. Despite one voice which maintained that where one starts in life goes a long way to explaining where one finishes, the group showed no enthusiasm whatsoever for any kind of what might loosely be described as class analysis. Despite its situation the group understood social stratification (inasmuch as they offered an understanding) as being a graduated pyramid - an understanding which is traditionally one of the middle class. This initial comparison leads me to an early thought that what the three groups (ie. excluding the pilot group) represent is one each of the three types of meaning

system identified by Parkin (1971) - dominant, subordinate and radical - and I will return to this later in the thesis.

The second comparison which can be drawn is one around the different perceptions in the group concerning power. The group which fastened on this concept with most alacrity was, again, Group C. The quotation which identified powerlessness as a defining factor for the poor was one with which the group very clearly and easily identified. The discussion of the same issue in Group A was in a rather different tone and touched on rather different questions. In Group A the discussion concentrated rather more on the extent to which the powerless and, by contrast, the powerful were present in the life of the church. In Group B there was only the briefest of mentions of power and powerlessness and that in the context of oppression - which itself went on to dominate the next part of the discussion. It may indeed be that it is in the context of oppression that power will receive its best consideration - I will therefore leave further discussion of this until I report on the third study.

The basic point about this first study, however, and the one on which this preliminary examination therefore ends, is on the poor and their relationship to the church. We saw in the study involving members of the pilot group that while they were willing to see the place of the church as

being with the poor, they were quite unwilling to see the poor as the real church. It would be fair to say that this way of seeing things was repeated at least in Group B. In Group A there was much of the same kind of feeling although there the very relevance of talking about the materially poor in this context was much more vehemently questioned. Group C could see much more in the idea that the poor are the real church - interpreting it, as we saw, in terms of the poor (at least in our society) having to make more effort and therefore as having a greater concern to make that effort. The poor cannot go to church because it is socially acceptable - because it is not.

There is one step further which requires to be taken at this stage and in relation to the examination of the relationship between the church and the poor. This further step is to look at the phrase which refers to the poor in spirit. There was almost universal confusion produced by this phrase - which shows just how much attention it receives from the church in its teaching. In every group (with, perhaps, the exception of the pilot study) I had to spend some time trying to work through with the group just what this phrase might mean and, in particular, what Waldron Scott might have meant when he used it. His particular conjunction of the spiritual with the material seemed to go against all the natural religious instincts of modern day Church of Scotland members. This confusion, I feel, is quite likely to arise again as the studies

progress and it may well prove vital in any analysis of how church people think and why they do so in a particular way. Liberation theology has a particular way of combining the spiritual and the material. It is in the ability (or lack of it) to match that method of combining the two that other attempts to use the thinking of liberation theology will stand or fall, an ability which will be further explored in chapter nine.

To sum up, then, the results from this section would seem to begin to verify Parkin's thesis (mentioned in chapter one and elaborated in chapter ten) that there are three different types of meaning system. The three groups seem to fit quite well into his three analyses and, at the very least, this would indicate that the three systems all exist within the church. Of course this says nothing about their prevalence or relative strengths but their very existence begins to support the assertion within liberation theology that social position has a bearing on reception and understanding of the Gospel.

CHAPTER FOUR: STUDY TWO - Suffering

Study Two - Isaiah 52:13-53:12

My servant will succeed,
he will rise to greatness and high honour.
As many were appalled at you,
so he was disfigured, he no longer looked human.
His appearance was no longer that of a man.
So he will bring many nations to their feet
and kings will stand speechless before him,
because they have seen something they have not been told
before,
and contemplated something they have not heard of before.
Who would have believed what we have heard?
To whom has Yahweh's power manifested itself?
He grew straight up like a young plant
with its roots in dry ground.
He had no dignity or majesty to make us look at him.
His appearance did not attract us to him.
He seemed vile, and avoided people,
tormented by pain and humbled by suffering,
like something men turn their faces from.
He seemed vile, and we took no notice of him.
Yet it was our suffering that he took,
our pain he bore,
whereas we for our part reckoned that he was afflicted,
struck down by God, and brought low.
But he was wounded because of our rebellion,
crushed because of our wrongdoing.
The chastening that brings us 'shalom' was required of him
and through his wounds healing came to us.
All of us have strayed like sheep,
we have each of us taken his own way,

but Yahweh has brought down on him
the guilt that belonged to all of us.
He was harshly treated, though he submitted humbly,
he did not open his mouth,
like a lamb led to the butcher's,
like a sheep dumb before her shearers.
He did not open his mouth.
He was arrested and sentenced, and led away,
and who gave a thought to his fate?
Yes, he was torn from the world of the living
because of the rebellion of my people, who deserved the
affliction.
He was given a grave among criminals,
among the lowest of men at his death,
although he had done no wrong,
and his mouth had uttered no lie.
But it was Yahweh's plan to crush him with pain.
When his life is offered for the guilt of others,
he will see his offspring and enjoy long life
and through him Yahweh's plan will prosper.
He will see fruit from his deep affliction,
he will find satisfaction through his humiliation.
My servant, being righteous, will bring righteousness to
many,
he will bear their guilt himself.
Therefore I will give him many as his possession
and he will distribute the mighty as spoil,
because he gave himself utterly, even to death,
and let himself be counted among rebels.
He took the sin of many
and intervened for the rebels.
(Goldingay, 1984, pp.158/9)

1. What is the cause of suffering?

"The song points to self-centred individualism as the essence of sin ... The Servant of the fourth song came to free us from our highly competitive indiviualism." (Hanks, 1983, p.86)

"People are suffering from economic exploitation ... political oppression ... cultural alienation through racialiam and sexual discrimination ... the emptiness of their personal life ... deeply ingrained primal fear which makes them so aggressive and inhuman toward other people ... Hunger for liberation is shown first of all by the change from dumb suffering to conscious pain. Quiet apathy is transformed into noisy protest." (Moltmann, 1979, p.97)

2. What is God's reply to suffering?

"For many, the experience of salvation is a sign that with the coming of Jesus, suffering and death are eliminated, and these will have no room in the Kingdom of God established here on earth. Jesus Christ is thus conceived by many African Christians as the great physician, healer and victor over wordly powers ... To many, Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. But the perturbing question is, where is this abundant life, when all around us we see suffering, poverty, oppression, strife, envy, war and destruction?" (Appiah-Kubi: in Parratt, 1987, p.76)

"In Matthew 8.17 ... the mission of this same servant (identified with Christ) consists in 'taking away' our pains and our suffering. This rendering contradicts the

customary interpretation of Isaiah 53, according to which he does not 'take away' but rather 'takes on himself' ... The mission of the servant is Krisis, that is, justice for all who suffer. Therefore in Matthew 8.17 it is not a question of Jesus taking upon himself our sufferings but rather of his eliminating them from the face of the earth." (Miranda, 1977, pp.129/130)

"The whole story of Israel, and the story of individual servants of God such as Jeremiah and Isaiah, was pointing to this central truth - that God must save the world through the suffering, rejection, defeat, shame of his servant." (Newbigin, 1956, p.54f.)

"For Christians only the recognition of the suffering of God in the cross of Christ makes eschatology unambiguous and hopeful. Without voluntary suffering for others, no power becomes the authority of life." (Moltmann, 1984, p.154)

"It is only because God participates in the weakness and sufferings of the slave who forgets his impotence and pain that there can be hope of liberation for him. The sufferings of God are thus the ground of hope for those who are without hope. God therefore is to be found not among the powerful but among those who are subject, who suffer, who are not given a future. In the words of Isaiah, the power of God is embodied in the most humble, most weak, most oppressed suffering servant ... The sufferings of the oppressed are thus not simply the sufferings of men but God's sufferings." (Alves, 1969, p.117)

"One look at the servant makes it clear that they are the sinners, not he. He is offered in sacrifice in their

place, in the way that an animal does when it is offered in sacrifice. And the whole thing is somehow Yahweh's own idea, and it reveals something very deep about him and about where his real might lies." (Goldingay, 1984, p.149)

3. What is the church's reply to suffering?

It is the institution of the church, through its members, which should be leading the attack on any organization, or any economic, social, or political structure which oppresses men, and which denies to them the right and power to live as the sons of a loving God. In the poor countries the church has this same role to play. It has to be consistently and actively on the side of the poor and unprivileged. It has to lead men towards godliness by joining with them in the attack against the injustices and deprivation from which they suffer." (Nyerere: in Parratt, 1987, p.127)

"Our encounter with the Lord occurs in our encounter with men, especially in the encounter with those whose human features have been disfigured by oppression, despoliation, and alienation and who have 'no beauty, no majesty' but are things 'from which men turn away their eyes' ... Our attitude towards them, or rather our commitment to them, will indicate whether or not we are directing our existence in conformity with the will of the Father." (Gutierrez, 1974, pp.202/3)

"Only he who speaks up for the Jews has a right to sing hymns in church." (Bonhoeffer)

"The record surely is - from Isaiah to the Gospels to the

Epistles and throughout the life of the church - that if we identify with the redemptive suffering love of the Kingdom, we run a substantial risk that we shall find ourselves called to live it." (Elliott, 1985, p.78)

"The poem is, to use a more prosaic term, a job-description. Or it is a challenge to the reader as to whether he is prepared to be a servant of this kind. The challenge, or invitation, may be accepted by Israel as a nation or by the church or by individuals who are willing to take it seriously. While Christians are convinced that Jesus alone met the challenge in the fullest sense, this does not mean that the passage is now a dead thing from the past, relevant only as a promise fulfilled in Christ. It is still God's vision for his people, and God's challenge to them." (Goldingay, 1984, p.156)

"In a distant country there is a factory, a factory making goods which are sold here in Europe, and because they are cheap they sell very well. To produce so cheaply the factory has to cut corners, and one such corner is safety. There are no guards on the machines, no money is spent on worker training and no first aid facilities are provided, while the judicious use of 'presents' ensures that the small number of factory inspectors do not interfere with this efficiency. So while the factory is labour cost-effective there are numerous accidents; about one arm a month is severed and fingers are lost almost weekly. Unfortunately the nearest hospital is many miles away and so many of the injuries prove fatal. A group of Christians living in the local town were shocked by these injuries and decided to do something. They organized the equivalent to our jumble sales and coffee mornings and raised sufficient money to set up a first aid post outside the factory gates.

Though the number of injuries remained unchanged the fatalities dropped significantly, and the group was rightly pleased with its efforts. But then one of the team suggested that perhaps they should do something to prevent the injuries occurring in the first place, in other words set about changing the conditions inside the factory. They could report the manager to the owner of the company, organize the workers to demand safety procedures or march to the town hall and ask for government action. His fellow Christians wre horrified at the suggestion. The manager was only doing his job: the factory was in competition with those in other towns and if it were not run efficiently it would be forced to close down. Besides what he was suggesting was 'political' and the church was not called to be involved in politics. They rejected his idea and continued their work at the gates. They are still there today." (Peberdy, 1986, p.7f.)

4. Can suffering ever be 'good'?

"It is the Suffering Slave, who is present in the suffering of all the slaves in the world, who, from Christ's suffering, finds the secret of and the power for the liberation of man. 'Only in the depths of suffering and despair,' Buber states, 'do men come to know grace.'" (Alves, 1969, p.121)

"In political activity and suffering one begins to read the bible with the eyes of the poor, the oppressed, and the guilty - and to understand it." (Moltmann, 1984, p.107)

"Life in hope for the future of God obviously cuts two ways: Hope sharpens suffering from the injustice of this

world and from the pain of the godless inhumanity of human beings, yet it also gives the strength to struggle for right and justice and never to acquiesce in enmity and strife. Hope in the kingdom of God makes persons capable of suffering and ready for the future." (Moltmann, 1984, p.210)

"The poem suggests that suffering accepted on behalf of others can 'bring peace', can 'heal', even to those who have 'taken their own way'. Here then is a ringing declaration of the power of love expressed in suffering to change values and perception." (Elliott, 1985, p.77)

"The impression that we get is that they found themselves compelled to reflect upon the contrast between what the servant was and what he had suffered, and what they themselves were and deserved to suffer, until they were moved to repentance and confession. The Servant had wrought in them a change of mind which they could never have achieved of themselves. This meant, for them, that 'the Lord brought down on him the iniquity of us all'." (North, 1964, p.238)

"One of the worst things about suffering is the feeling that you are alone, and it is some comfort to have someone to share your suffering with you. The man in the vision let himself be afflicted so that he could share the affliction which people in general brought on themselves by their sin." (Goldingay, 1984, p.145)

"All one can actually see is disfigurement, suffering, pain loss, abandonment, misunderstanding and death. That is all that is visible. But then we are challenged to look with the insight of faith and see that the suffering, the pain,

and the loss can be mysteriously meaningful and mysteriously glorious." (Goldingay, 1984, p.157)

The second study moved on to what more than one of the participants described as heavier material. It was much more strictly theological in its approach - a variation from the social emphasis of the first study and what will be a more political emphasis in the third. The focus here was on suffering - on what suffering does to people, what causes it, how participants saw it in relation to God and to the church. In particular I was interested to find out if people could see suffering as being in any way good or beneficial - and if so, how. The biblical passage used was Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

Group A:
There were only two members present from the group at this session - the two men.

The first question asked about the cause of suffering. There was immediately a disagreement about the relationship between suffering and sin. One saying that the two could not be linked on any individualist basis, the other claiming 'a very strong connection' between the two. This latter point of view was very definitely linked to life

experience of depressive illness - and this way of seeing things appeared to provide meaning when nothing else could. This led into what might best be described as a discussion of providence including how things might be connected in ways other than direct causal links. The possibilities of collective or social explanations for suffering (as proposed by Moltmann) did not receive much interest and Hanks' analysis involving competitive individualism as the source of sin served only to move the discussion to the ground described above - ie. to sin but not to individualism.

The second question moved us on to what is basically traditional theodicy - a subject which liberation theology claims to approach with a quite distinct emphasis in comparison to traditional European theology. The difference is, they claim, that European theology is concerned with why God allows suffering, while Latin American theology concentrates on how God acts to abolish it. I was interested here, therefore, in how people would approach this basic dichotomy. There was no fundamental disagreement with the idea that God can be the source of suffering - for the purpose of correction. What was important, it was thought, was the way in which one reacted to suffering. Some, it was said, actually enjoy suffering and ill-health whereas others who are, objectively

speaking, suffering quite badly hardly seem to notice it. Importance was attached to 'being in touch with deity' because that 'lifted' one and made suffering easier to bear. Without quoting them directly, therefore, we had moved to the position (almost) of Moltmann and Alves in saying that God is with us in our suffering - and how far is that from saying that God suffers with those who suffer?

The two men were at this point making real efforts to relate the discussion to their own experience. The one who had suffered from mental illness maintained strongly throughout that none of the physical suffering he had had in his lifetime could possibly compare to that. Despite what was said above, however, about being aware of divine help, neither man thought that a person who was suffering would be comforted by being told that God was suffering with them. In this, I feel, they were bringing out the difference between theory and practice - being told that God is with you does nothing; what makes sense is feeling that God is with you, feeling that he is suffering with you. Experience counts for far more than any amount of well-meant talk.

In question three, we moved from God to the church and what its response to suffering might or should be. I pointed

discussion first in this question to the quotation from Bonhoeffer (as I did also with the other groups) and asked if he was not overstating his case. The response here was that he, in his situation, was not but that our situation was very different - he was dealing with black and white while we are asked to choose between shades of grey. I asked how church people might react to Goldingay's idea that the poem under discussion was in fact a job description for Christians. The answer which came was in terms of sympathy and 'being there' - at least as far as suffering in the local community was concerned. The phrase 'love your neighbour' was quoted as being central to this discussion by the elder from another church (the previous point had been made by the elder from Church A itself) and by this he was actually making a quite different point. While the previous point had been essentially one about 'suffering with', this point was in terms of doing something, alleviating distress. It was, to use current business jargon, a 'can do' response. This contrast points up the distinction being made earlier in relation to the biblical passage by Miranda - that of taking on or taking away the sins of the world. The question is whether one of these is a more faithful response than the other.

The story by Max Peberdy was used to sum up this section, to point up the first-aid and radical options available for

Christians in their response to suffering. The contrast was drawn between trying to do something about the 'grand problems' and simply coping with the problems which are in front of us and to which we have been led. The choice which Peberdy presents is one which he deliberately leaves ambiguous - he does not point us obviously to one answer (or at least not without pointing out the problems contained therein). In the same way this discussion of it (like, I think we will find, the discussions in the other groups) was left without coming to any firm conclusions about an appropriate course of action. This reflects a real dilemma for Christians in many places and one which will not be overcome by one discussion in abstracto. Answers, all these studies seem to be saying, come in real situations involving real people - they come in action, not in theory.

In response to the question about whether or not suffering could ever be good, it was agreed that suffering voluntarily assumed on behalf of someone else can actually give one a lift, can make one feel good - if, in the process, one feels that one has done or is doing the other some good. Trying to hide from suffering, protect oneself from its effects, was seen as being unhealthy. Suffering could actually create depth and understanding. Most importantly, money and social standing were not answers to

or preventions from suffering. Happiness and misery had to be measured in quite different ways from that. Suffering, as was said much earlier, was not the most important aspect but rather the reaction which was provoked by it.

Group B:

The first point which this group took up was that of the seeming contradiction between, on the one hand, greatness and high honour and, on the other, being struck down. One suggestion was that being struck down was a consequence of the greatness - a suggestion which was immediately resisted. From there the conversation moved on to the quotation from Hanks concerning self-centred individualism: "presumably what he is referring to as sin is the self-centred bit, because presumably there is nothing wrong with being an individualist". Another point made was that what was regarded as being wrong was that individualism was highly competitive. Yet another nuance was introduced when degree of individualism was thought of as the determining factor - we are all self-regarding to a certain degree, the question is how much that works to effect the exclusion of others from our regard. Greatness of itself, it was said, implies individualism - but true greatness is also accompanied by humility. The discussion then became one

about leadership and what is acceptable leadership and what is not - and it became clear that here was a group of people who were at home with the idea, at least, of exercising leadership. The rights and wrongs of competitiveness were debated and we began to get in to educational theories where at least one member of the group of four thought competition was a good thing.

We moved on briefly to discuss the quotation from Moltmann and to the point that we can cause suffering for others quite unthinkingly through ignorance of the effects of our actions.

Question two brought us to thoughts around whether or not God removes or should be expected to remove suffering. One thought was that the kind of expectation being expressed by Appiah-Kubi is in fact quite dangerous because it produces a faith which is extremely vulnerable to disappointment. The second point made here was in fact quite interesting: "My problem here is that I don't know what suffering is. We don't live amongst it. We don't see it at first hand. We read about it ... but I couldn't honestly say I had seen people suffering." Attempts were made to broaden the definition of suffering in order to make it a factor in local life and to include the experience of the group in what was being discussed. Suffering, like poverty, was

said to be relative.

A second aspect of the same problem is the distinction drawn by Miranda between God removing suffering and taking it upon himself. The second of these positions was represented in the study by the quotations from Moltmann and Alves. Moltmann's point about voluntary suffering (and Goldingay's about this being God's own idea) took us on to question three.

We again started question three with Bonhoeffer. If translated into today, it was thought, it might cause consternation in the pews. This kind of entry, however, into the political arena was thought to be not only inevitable but also correct. Change and justice are the only real answers to suffering - not simple charitable giving. Moving to Elliott and Goldingay was an attempt to see how all this might relate to us. They were acceptable to some because they were not party-political and capable of being responded to "in your own corner". Just how individuals can become involved in the struggle against suffering commanded some attention with the general concensus seeming to be that one does what one can in ones own surroundings and contributes to the wider effort by the giving of money. The person who voiced this formula

(supported by the others) went on to make the point that it is only ever a minority who are actively involved in any struggle - and this seemed to fit in with what the same person said in the previous meeting when he suggested that only a minority could be involved in fighting for the rights of the poor.

I suggested that one way of taking on the suffering of others would be for those with large houses and unused rooms to use them to house those currently sleeping in cardboard boxes on the streets of Edinburgh. One person had the honesty to admit that she could not think of anything worse. The man who had earlier pointed out that only small numbers of people are involved in anything at any one time said that, "everybody has a role to play but we don't all have to play the same role". He went on to say that we all have a responsibility to find what we are called to do - and not to expect others to do that for us. Another woman related her experience of housing refugees for short periods of time and the joy which that had brought her. The fourth member of the group talked of the need for special skills in this as in other areas. He talked of gifts which some had and others had not. We talked of whether or not it was necessary, in service of others and in attempts to relieve their suffering, that people should expect to enjoy what they were doing, or

whether there were certain things which simply had to be done even though there was nothing enjoyable about it. The answer was that there certainly were some such tasks but that even some of these, if accomplished in fellowship, can still allow satisfaction from the accomplishment.

We looked at the story by Max Peberdy. Discussion involved Union Carbyde at Bhopal, the Green Party and modern industry, the suffering of creation, and unemployment - but did not come to any conclusion about the merits of the points of view presented in the story itself.

I asked the group, when dealing with question four, which of the quotations was nearest their own thoughts. There was immediately a vote for the first of Goldingay's comments - on the importance of sharing affliction. The second vote went to the second of Goldingay's extracts - saying that behind suffering and pain there is mysterious meaning and glory. If there were not this mystery there would be no meaning and no hope. Support was offered for the notion of voluntary suffering as expressed by Alves and Elliott and the reference to Alves and his quotation of Buber brought us back to the idea expressed earlier that no-one in the group had experienced suffering of a sufficiently intense nature to be able to understand this properly. I suggested that it was too easy, in a sense, to

discuss this if we did not see the suffering and despair of which Buber speaks as truly life-threatening. The power, however, of ones own suffering to do some good was affirmed in the proliferation of self-help groups.

I asked about the quotation from Moltmann which referred particularly to the reading of the bible. It was a statement which to my surprise was not disputed - the response being given that one will not know what the bible is talking about if all one does is sit in a pew and have beautiful thoughts.

Group C:

There were four members present in this meeting - three who had been present at the first and one other.

I first asked the group, in the context of question one, if they could themselves come up with causes of suffering. The initial responses were around the list given in the quotation from Moltmann. Then the new member of the group suggested that the greatest suffering came from feeling apart from God, from the subsequent loneliness. I drew attention to the point from Hanks which said that being apart from God was often due to self-centred individualism

but this, at this juncture, produced no response.

We moved on to question two. The new member of the group suggested that the removal of pain and suffering from the face of the earth was a matter of time. I asked if people were ever asked by non-Christians about how they accounted for pain and suffering in the world. The response was universally in the affirmative. Answers given included freewill and human sin, that it was the easy way out to blame God for the problems of the world. The next question on this which I put concerned how comforting the traditional responses were when offered to someone in deep distress. There had to be, I was told, a willingness to accept the answers given and without this no words would hold any comfort. Time and belief were both necessary - though sometimes if a person is really plumbing the depths then they need the belief of another to hold them up until their own can take over. The faith of another can give them the time they need.

We started in question three with Bonhoeffer. This group, of the three with which I am working, was the one which identified most with this quotation. Only here did anyone take the statement and expand upon it - talking about hypocrisy and the evil of standing back and letting something happen, making the link to today and the fact

that many similar situations (or at least comparable ones) still occur. When I suggested that Bonhoeffer might have beeen making too strong a case, I was immediately contradicted. We moved on to the thought that the church was called to help those whom no-one else would. The difficulties and often personal danger involved were recognized. The conversation went on to mental illness and popular attitudes to it - to how they had changed and how they still need to change. Some of the group had been involved in taking children to sing carols in a mental hospital, and they and the children had all been affected by the experience of going into a ward and having the door locked behind them - a real moment of sympathy, of fellow-suffering. Other experiences followed which all served to illustrate the human person behind every 'sufferer'.

We then looked at the story from Max Peberdy. It shows up one of the basic choices for the church when deciding its response to suffering - whether to be involved simply in first aid or to approach things from a more preventative perspective. It was suggested that every church member was involved in matters like this every time they bought cheap third world goods - though this did not excuse governments from their responsibilities for keeping an eye on imports and what goes into their production nor, presumably, the church from keeping the government informed of its

responsibilities. The choices involved in this area were, however, acknowledged as being difficult choices and ones which were not always capable of being categorized in terms of black and white.

On question four, the first point made was that the suffering of Christians can be to the glory of God - an exemplary witness to the strength of faith. Another talked of the admiration engendered by the quiet acceptance of suffering. Suffering could also be regarded as good once it had been relieved and the lessons of the pain learned. Agreement was expressed with Goldingay's point about the importance of support, of not suffering alone. Another reckoned that the other quotation from Goldingay was nearest to her own feelings - that only in suffering is your faith brought out and that the process involved in this is profoundly mysterious. There was also the observation that small amounts of suffering seem to produce huge amounts of complaint whereas real, appreciable suffering is more often endured in silence. It was not thought that Buber was totally out of order in his linkage of suffering and grace but the group drew back from his suggestion that 'only' through suffering and despair do people come to know grace. The link that Moltmann seems to draw between suffering and understanding the bible was examined. It was suggested that in the midst of suffering

you will find the bible speaking to your situation in a way in which it does not at any other time.

At the end of the session one member expressed the 'joy and excitement' of free will and this was related to the chance to take on voluntary suffering on behalf of others. It was also related to the much-used ability to make mistakes and say things wrongly in a way which we cannot thereafter correct. The last point made was, in fact, one which one might have expected to be made at other times as well - but this was the only point at which it appeared. That was that, in relation to the reference in the passage to disfigurement, there is a marked parallel to be drawn between the common biblical disfigurement of leprosy and the modern disfigurement of AIDS. The response of the church and of society to people with AIDS was seen as in some way a test of their attitude to suffering and to outcasts and ultimately to the call of the Gospel.

Discussion

As I pointed out earlier, one of the claims of liberation theology is that its approach to the area traditionally

described as theodicy is quite distinct. Taken alongside its other claims about the epistemological privilege of the poor, this should mean that the reactions to talk of suffering should be different in different sectors of society - that those who have more should opt more often than those who have less for an understanding which seeks to explain suffering as opposed to one which seeks to work at suffering's elimination. This study therefore sought to establish the beginnings of an insight into the veracity of such claims.

To begin at the end, it was my initial expectation (or at least the expectation of the theory outlined above) that those who were able to see suffering as good would be those who were less concerned with its elimination - ie. those who suffered less in their own lives, those who have more by way of material goods. The reality turns out to be considerably more complicated and multi-faceted than that. There were, in fact, many similarities in the responses in the various groups which might begin to suggest that the whole thesis above is wrong-headed. On the other side of the coin, however, there are also some significant differences - though not, perhaps, the differences that might have been easily anticipated by the kind of simplistic analysis that has been offered thus far.
The similarities were as follows. There was some agreement

that suffering was to be understood in terms of its outcome - that if it could be seen that suffering resulted in good then you could argue that it was good:

> "For I reckon that the sufferings we now endure bear no comparison with the glory, as yet unrevealed, which is in store for us."
> (Romans 8.18)

The means in some mysterious way justify the end, many from all groups seemed to say. Most were also keen to add, however, that the ability to see things this way could not be imposed upon someone - it was something to which each person had to come for themselves. Because of this, this first point led on to a second on which there seemed to be some kind of general agreement: that the reaction to suffering is as important as the suffering itself. This is not to say, of course, that participants were not aware of the humiliation and degradation so often associated with all kinds of suffering. It is to say that the external description of the conditions under which somebody exists does not of itself provide a complete understanding of what is going on. A third point of agreement which spread itself over all three groups, though not perhaps over every member of each, was that the important aspect of suffering is that it should not be endured alone.

Here we can look at responses to suffering. The most obvious difference between the groups was over the

quotation from Bonhoeffer. No-one felt able or, perhaps, willing to criticize this directly but some hedged their acceptance of it about with various comments which concerned the difference between his time and situation and ours. Only the participants in Group C accepted the statement without reservation or qualification. It implied also an acceptance of Goldingay's idea of the job description in a way which others had hesitated over for varying lengths of time. With others, particularly in Group B, there was given the distinct impression that the spirit was willing but that there was a real fear that the flesh would be weak. There was, nevertheless, an acceptance in Group B that it would be fair to say, as Gutierrez does, that we can be judged by how we treat the most suffering in our society. Group C members did themselves struggle a little over commitment to those whom society has rejected - they too worried that the flesh would be weak, but it was there that our attention was drawn to the obvious case of people with AIDS and to the importance of acceptance of them and the ability to be with them.

It was in the first question that the most singular contribution from Group A appeared - and that from just the one man (for his viewpoint was not supported). Truth, however, is not measured in numbers and we must pay

attention to the point just the same. The point in question is in the connection between suffering and sin. The man who made the point stated that he realised he was treading on dangerous ground but wanted nevertheless to insist that there was a very real connection between suffering and sin and, in particular, between individual suffering and individual sin - in other words that in some way which we do not and cannot understand we get what we deserve. This man has suffered in his own life quite a lot both mentally and physically and it has to be presumed that by this type of analysis he sought to account for his own suffering as well as for that of others. It is the quotation from Hanks which pointed up the connection with sin but only this man in this way took up discussion of the quotation in these terms. (In Group B the emphasis was on getting out of the condemnation of individualism and in Group C the discussion was taken up more with the quotation from Moltmann.) Making this kind of direct connection may have been popular at one time but is no longer so - neither is it the point which Hanks is seeking to make. It will be worth exploring the connections here further in chapter nine.

In the second question there was basically a choice being offered between seeing God's reaction to suffering as being to take it on himself or as being to wipe it out. In Group

B it was thought that the kind of understanding on offer from Appiah-Kubi was not adequate to the realities of our world. The reaction in Group C, however, was to see the seeming choice as more a question of chronology - the aim for God is indeed to wipe away all tears and that, as indicated above, there is a glory to come when disease and death will be forever defeated but, until then, God will suffer with his creation and take upon himself its pain. Kaimes, in a sense, had one member on each side of the putative divide.

The parable told by Max Peberdy left people not so much divided among themselves as within themselves. Most could see both sides of the coin and felt unable to abandon one in favour of the other. In many ways, however, it reflects (as a choice for our action in response to suffering) the choice Miranda and others pose for our understanding of the Gospel and of God. It is a choice, therefore, which we must regard as central to our exploration in this series of studies - and the fact that most were unwilling to make it will of necessity loom large in any final assessment of the way in which the bible is received in Scotland. The liberationist approach would regard this choice as the basic point of commitment and some work will have to go in to deciding if such an approach is relevant here - for if it is the implications must be far-reaching.

The first two studies have examined poverty and suffering. Only in one or two isolated comments was any connection made between the two. It would be true to say, I think, that poverty was discussed in far more collective terms than was suffering - our talk in relation to suffering being far more of individuals. The third study, however, will seek to tie together poverty and suffering - and tie them in a particular way. We will look at the idea and the reality of oppression and see how people react to the thought that poverty and suffering are both the results of oppression (ie. that they do not just happen but are caused).

Study Three - Ezekiel 22:23-31

"This word of the Lord came to me: 'O man, say to Jerusalem: You are like a land on which no rain has fallen, no shower has come in the time of my wrath. The princes within her are like lions growling as they tear their prey. They devour the people, and seize their wealth and valuables; they make widows of many women within her. Her priests give rulings which violate my law, and profane what is sacred to me. They do not distinguish between sacred and profane, and enforce no dis-tinction between clean and unclean. They disregard my sabbaths, and I am dishonoured among them. The city's leaders are like wolves tearing their prey, shedding blood and destroying people's lives to obtain ill-gotten gain. Her prophets whitewash over the cracks, their vision is false and their divination a lie. They say, "This is the word of the Lord God," when the Lord has not spoken. The common people resort to oppression and robbery; they ill-treat the unfortunate and the poor, they oppress the alien and deny him justice. I looked among them for a man who would build a barricade in the breach and withstand me, to avert the destruction of the land; but I found no such person. I poured out my wrath on them and utterly consumed them in my blazing anger. Thus I brought on them the punishment they had deserved. This is the word of the Lord God."

1. Where does oppression come from?

"Oppression proceeds exclusively from objective conditions. The first of these is the existence of privileges; and it is not men's laws or decrees which determine privileges, nor yet titles to property; it is the very nature of things." (Simone Weil, 1958, p.63)

The prophet Ezekiel, both an exile and immigrant in Babylon, ... clearly shows the relationship between oppression and poverty. In his great chapter on individual responsibility, the prophet repeatdly insists that the just person must be generous with the poor and not enslave them. When Judah did not fulfill these divine requirements, the nation was carried into captivity." (Hanks, 1983, p.9)

"The prophets condemn every kind of of abuse, every form of keeping the poor in poverty or of creating new poor people. They are not merely allusions to situations; the finger is pointed at those who are to blame. Fraudulent commerce and exploitation are condemned ... as well as the hoarding of lands ... dishonest courts ... the violence of the ruling classes ... slavery ... unjust taxes ... and unjust functionaries." (Gutierrez, 1974, p.293)

"The verses from Ezekiel show us how murderous oppression has for its background the desire to increase one's wealth." (Tamez, 1982, p.52)

2. Who are oppressed?

"The indigenous worker sees the migrant in an 'inferior' position, and what he sees and hears emphasizes how the migrant is different. Different to the point of being unknowable ... From being unknowable the migrant comes to be seen as being beneath understanding: as being intrinsically unpredictable, disorganized, feckless, devious. And then the inverted commas around inferior disappear." (John Berger, 1975, pp.139/140)

"By any humane criteria, the assault of June 3-4 was futile, random, insane. The students had attacked nobody and damaged nothing. But those who ordered the attack werenot aiming simply to disperse a demonstration. They

were seeking to eradicate, through terror, the idea that any direct challenge could be mounted to their own authority. Their targets were not only those people still on the streets of Peking, but all who sympathized with them, both inside and outside the Party. Opposition had to be seen to be crushed." (Fathers and Higgins, 1989, p.3)

"Draw near, woman, and hear what I have to say. Turn your curiosity for once towards useful objects, and consider the advantages which nature gave you and society ravished away. Come and learn how you were born the companion of man and became his slave; how you grew to like the condition and think it natural; and finally how the long habituation of slavery so degraded you that you preferred its sapping but convenient vices to the more difficult virtues of freedom and repute." (Choderlos de Laclos, 1783: in Greer, 1971, p.16)

"In general, to the extent that the receiving society tends to treat all the immigrants alike, through the structure of its economy and institutions and through colour consciousness, this will tend to cast the immigrants into a common role, give them a common history, call forth in them a complementary sense of black-and-brown consciousness, and lead them to see themselves first and foremost as members of an oppressed class." (David J. Smith, 1977, p.333)

"Soldiers and police, now called 'security forces', were indemnified for any act of violence committed against the local population. They both had unlimited powers to detain, raid and search; break up meetings and funerals; set up road blocks; impose curfews and seal off townships or villages to prevent anyone from entering ... Reports reaching churches and other bodies monitoring repression around the country clearly indicated that after the state of emergency a wide range of people, regardless of their

political involvement, were being terrorised by the forces of so-called law and order. What emerges from these reports is that the main target of this terror has been children and adolescents." (Frank Chicane: in Kinnock, Lester and Ruddock, 1988, pp.211/2)

"An engaging illustration is provided by Brendan Behan in reviewing his contest with two warders upon his admission to Walton prison:
"And 'old up your 'ead, when I speak to you."
"'Old up your 'ead, when Mr. Whitbread speaks to you," said Mr. Holmes. I looked round at Charlie. His eyes met mine and he quickly lowered them to the ground.
"What are you looking round at, Behan? Look at me."
I looked at Mr. Whitbread. "I am looking at you," I said.
"You are looking at Mr. Whitbread - what?" said Mr. Holmes.
"I am looking at Mr. Whitbread."
Mr. Holmes looked gravely at Mr. Whitbread, drew back his open hand, and struck me on the face, held me with his other hand and struck me again. My head spun and burned and pained and I wondered would it happen again. I forgot and felt another smack, and forgot, and another, and moved, and was held by a steadying, almost kindly hand, and another, and my sight was a vision of red and white and pity-coloured flashes.
"You are looking at Mr. Whitbread - what Behan?"
I gulped and got together my voice and tried again till I got it out.
"I, sir, please, sir, I am looking at you, I mean, I am looking at Mr. Whitbread, sir." (Goffmann, 1968, p.26f.)

3. <u>How do we react?</u>

"For the Church should want to be identified with the pursuit of social justice. And that is what I am asking you to promote. The poor and the oppressed should come to

you not for alms, but for support against injustice." (Nyerere: in Parratt, 1987, p.126)

"Poverty is one side of a coin of which theother side is affluence and exploitation. The Church must discover that oppressed people are not merely unconnected individuals but a class." (Boesak: in Parratt, 1987, p.135)

"The true Christian response to White domination can only come from those who suffer under that domination. As Whites we do not exper-ience this domination, or at least we never experience it as the total, ultimate and all-pervading meaning of our lives. We are therefore in no position to tell the oppressed Black man what Christianity must mean for him. In this situation of oppression a White Church is not even in a position to interpret the Gospel ... The primary task of a Church which finds itself in this position is to listen - to listen to the voice of the oppressed and to their interpretation of the Gospel." (Desmond, 1978, p.13)

"We are finally coming to understand a discomforting but central fact of reality - the people of the nonindustrialized world are poor because we are rich; the poverty of the masses is maintained and perpetuated by our systems and institutions and by the way we live our lives. In other words, the oppressive conditions of life in the poor countries, like the causes of poverty and misery in our own land, are neither merely accidental nor because of the failures of the poor." (Wallis, 1984, p.60)

"The salvation of the oppressed is ... effected against the unjust. Among a people in which injustice reigns, it is always Yahweh-justice who reveals himself by intervening." (Miranda, 1977, p.80f.)

"It seems likely enough that the Catholic church in England

will continue uninterrupted on the road it has taken partly by force of circumstance and partly by choice. This is the road to becoming just another Christian denomination, without any very outstanding characteristics of its own, unable to make effective any particular demands as to belief or practice, primarily middle-class in composition, and giving its support to the prevailing ethos in which the fundamental rightness of the present arrangements of society is affirmed, and through which the interests of the powerful are sustained." (Archer, 1986, p.258)

This third study brought the first two (on poverty and suffering) into a particular focus - that of oppression. This brought the discussion more pointedly on to the idea that poverty and suffering can be seen not simply as misfortunes but rather as the results of the actions of a person, or group of persons, which work to the detriment of another person or group of persons. In other words, we moved here onto the idea that there is somebody 'to blame'. Within this it was possible to discuss the more general ideas about oppression which people had - including their ideas about who could properly be described as being oppressed and who could not. The biblical passage used was Ezekiel 22:23-31.

Group A:

The first question which was approached was that of the origins of oppression. Two possible answers were offered: one which said that this was simply the way things are in

the world (Weil); and one which said that wealth or the desire for it lay behind oppression (Hanks and Tamez). The first answer on offer here, as in other groups, was that power and the desire for that must have a large role to play. (It could be noted here, and I will come back to this, that for some in the first study power or its lack was not a good way of approaching the idea of poverty, but that for almost all it seemed a perfectly appropriate way of approaching oppression.) The example of Eastern Europe was prominent in this discussion. The group here, however, was keen not to propose an absolute distinction between power and wealth - arguing that the one feeds off the other. The term which was suggested as including the two was 'self-interest'.

The conversation then moved on to the oppressed as opposed to the oppressors. Oppression, it was suggested, was in many cases a state of mind which had its conception in the desire of those 'underneath' to change places with those on top. If, it was said, such people were truly selfless then they would not even notice their oppression. (This actually relates back to the quotation from Moltmann in the first section of study two - where he suggests that there are indeed many who do not notice their own suffering and oppression and for whom the first step to liberation is a greater consciousness of their pain.) There was some disagreement between, on the one hand, one who argued that those at the bottom felt the accumulated oppression of

numerous layers above each bearing down on the layer immediately below; and, on the other, one who continued to maintain the point made earlier - that feeling oppressed arises out of the denial of the opportunity to oppress in turn. "A perfect Christian would not feel oppressed."

There now came an attempt to begin to distinguish different kinds of oppression - including the realisation that release from a particular oppression did not necessarily imply release from oppression in general. The example given here was the abolition of slavery in the United States of America, where the 'release' of the slaves did not mean that all was thereby made well - in fact all was so clearly not well that it was not uncommon for slaves to return to their former owners asking to be taken back because otherwise they might starve. The elder from the other church who, until now had been the one pushing most strongly that oppression is not felt by real Christians, now argued that 'the people at the top' were very far from having an easy life - that many felt extremely empty, they realised better than most that money could not buy everything. The former bus-driver pointed out, however, that that was not oppression.

We then moved to question two which had various quotations concerned with what might be regarded as examples of oppression. I asked if all the quotations given were regarded by the members of the group as being accurate or

valid descriptions of real situations of oppression. I asked particularly about the Smith quotation concerning racial prejudice and oppression in Britain - partly at least because that particular quotation had a direct bearing on the comment in Ezekiel which talks about the common people oppressing the alien and denying him justice. By common consent the group decided that what was being described by Smith was a subjective impression rather than an objective reality. The objective reality, it was said, relates to many years ago which has come down in a kind of folk memory. The feeling of oppression nowadays relates more to a clash of cultures and an unwillingness to adapt and integrate. (It was pointed out that many British people going to other countries were doing and had done exactly the same thing.) The current unrest within the Moslem community came to the fore at this point with the opinion being expressed that there were many who came to this country for what it could offer them but that, once here, they were unwilling to abide by this country's laws. The government was held to be being very weak over death threats and the like and not prosecuting for encitement to murder. There were two different views of the police expressed - one that the police in places like Liverpool fall over backwards to placate the 'coloured' community, the other that large numbers in the police force were out-and-out racists. (These two impressions, of course, are not necessarily mutually exclusive.) Other instances apart from the police, however, confirmed for at least one

participant the view that many black people have a chip on their shoulder - eg. being turned off a bus because it was full was interpreted as racism rather than a simple matter of arithmetic.

When we looked at the quotation from Berger, there was a much more positive response. The idea that, for example, a person living in inferior housing could move to being seen as an inferior person was an idea readily acceptable and readily seen in terms of oppression. The position in Edinburgh of someone, say , from Craigmillar going for a job and being turned down because of their address was seen as being applicable here.

We moved to the oppression of women and to the quotation from 1783 by Choderlos de Laclos (who wrote "Les Liaisons Dangereuses") and I asked if things had changed in the last two hundred years. The only woman in the group affirmed strongly that they had. We explored, briefly, the sexual stereotyping of occupations - prompted by references in Edinburgh Presbytery meetings to "elders and lady elders". The opinion seemed to be that the second world war had changed things with women assuming roles in society previously occupied by men. There was not, however, a feeling that this change in circumstances had been entirely and completely positive. The effect, it was reckoned, of women assuming previously male positions in employment was that cheaper labour thus became available and the net

result was male unemployment which even today might not exist if more women remained at home. For those women who do not remain at home, however, and instead pursued a career life was nevertheless far from rosy. They have, in most cases, to be twice as good and twice as hard-working as a man in order to get on as well. (Lest it be thought that what is related above indicates a debate between two factions, it should be said here that these points were being made by the same people.) The final point on this area showed that there are still certain presumptions about the role of women, at least in the family: if a man goes to university you educate the man, if a woman goes to university you educate a whole family. The point was accepted by all. And all, it seemed, were unwilling to accept that today women can be properly described as being oppressed.

The next quotation to which we turned was that from Michael Fathers and Andrew Higgins - from their book entitled 'Tiananmen'. I asked if there was such a thing as 'oppression by example' - the creation of fear. Response to this was one of general, though tacit, acceptance and the quotation provoked little response.

We moved on to Brendan Behan and his experience upon reception into prison. I wanted, in this section, to find out if people thought of prisoners as being in any way oppressed or whether they thought that whatever came their

way while being punished came into the category of their just desert. The first response was in terms of power which, given power's earlier connection with oppression, might indicate that their was some support for the idea that prisoners can be oppressed. I asked if, given a sufficient degree of power, we might all be tempted into being oppressors. The answer was one of immediate agreement. Experience of the army in the war had demonstrated to one participant that the basic makeup of many would have fitted easily into the Nazi mentality against which they were supposed to be fighting. As far as the situation of Brendan Behan was concerned, there was general agreement that the two prison officers were primarily exercising an authority which had been vested in them - oppression, if it existed in this situation, existed precisely in that (the situation) rather than primarily in the people.

The role of fear in oppression was returned to when we looked at the quotation from Frank Chikane on the state of emergency in South Africa. That is, fear on the part of the oppressor. I asked if it was thought, therefore, that this was generally relevant to all talk of oppression. The answer was that it was. There was one voice (echoed by at least one other person in another group) which confessed to being totally baffled by the situation in South Africa and therefore reluctant to make any specific comments on that specific situation. Another, however, went straight back

to the idea of fear on the part of the oppressor and said that that it was quite likely that the blacks would in future treat the whites every bit as badly as the whites had treated them. I asked if he thought this would happen and his response was to cite the example of Zimbabwe. This prompted a dispute about whether or not this had indeed been what had happened in Zimbabwe. There was, however, no extended discussion on Chicane's comments.

The third question turned the spotlight on how we, as a church, react to oppression. We started by looking at perhaps the most controversial statement of those on the sheet - that by Cosmas Desmond who suggests that in a situation like South Africa a church composed predominantly of the privileged cannot even interpret the gospel but must listen to the interpretation offered by those on the underside of the system. This was difficult for one member of the group to accept because, he said, suffering does not necessarily make anyone spiritually superior. Another accepted what Desmond was saying in the sense that only those who suffer from oppression can comment on that oppression. The answer that came back cited the example of Trevor Huddleston who, as a white in South Africa, still had a 'word' to say on the situation there. I asked if oppression was simply a matter of individual decision or if it was in some sense imbedded in situations in which an individual becomes involved. In South Africa, it was said, whites could not "drift into a particularly Christian

position - to get anywhere they have to take a stand".

We moved on to the quotation from Allan Boesak and that from Jim Wallis, both putting oppression in the context I mentioned at the beginning - that of someone being 'to blame'. I asked if it was the general perception that people were poor all over the world because of those who were rich in certain parts of the world. There was general assent to this, with comment being made about the relevance of class (in this country) and the problem of personal debt in this country was contrasted with the vast increases in earnings of some company directors (100% in one year being quoted).

I moved the discussion to Nyerere and the question of alms and asked if alms-giving was, in fact, not what the church had been doing longest and at which it excelled. It may be best at alms-giving, was the response, but it is not what it should be best at. Another response was that the church does not actually give that many alms and that which it gives is best given in the context of a mission. "But, you see, the church is predominantly middle-class." This took us on to Archer and his comments about the Catholic church in England - taking his comments to be applicable to most churches in Britain. There was general support for his assertion that churches support the interests of the powerful through their affirmation of the rightness of current arrangements. This despite the reminder that many

within the church have for many years raised the hackles of the powerful, a tradition which is still being upheld today.

We ended with a reminder of those who are among the most oppressed who yet maintain a contentment and happiness which belies their objective conditions. The most spiritual people are those who have nothing and accept their lot - those who can accept their faith as well without long explanations. "Spirituality is not a mental process."

2) Group B:

When asked about the genesis of oppression, this group too opted for power rather than desire for wealth as the motivating force. They were unhappy about accepting as it stood the statement by Simone Weil that oppression was simply part of the natural order of things. Oppression, it was thought, might be seen to be natural inasmuch as it was the result of a natural tendency to compete - thus those who lost out in that competition might feel themselves to be oppressed by those who came out on top in that process. In this way of looking at things, what is important is that the rules of competition make that competition fair and allow some degree of protection where necessary for the

losers. Another attempt at defining the starting point of oppression was in, "the inability to understand that someone else might have another viewpoint." Comparison was made between South Africa and the Soviet Union in an attempt to understand what made oppression tick - and the discussion was brought inexorably back to the exercise of power.

The first quotation picked up in the second section was that of John Berger. The thought was expressed that someone in an inferior position was indeed, to all intents and purposes, inferior simply by dint of their allocated place - and only those who "put their back into it" will move away from this kind of designation. (Of course in the Gastarbeiter system to which Berger is referring such a move is made institutionally impossible.) We talked about what the problems might be for those who wished to 'improve' themselves. Problems of language were mentioned as was the social background of those coming in before they arrived. Interestingly no mention was made at this point of race or colour. I suggested that what Berger was getting at particularly was that oppression can occur without the necessity of individual decision, it can simply be built into the fabric within which we live our lives. The question then arose as to the effect of large numbers of immigrants might have upon that fabric. To a certain extent, of course, the discussion to this point had been looking at not only the quotation from Berger but also at

that from Smith.

We looked at the oppression of women. It was not a question which produced total agreement about its modern relevance. Times, it was agreed, had changed if for no other reason than that the upkeep of a home was not the full-time job it had once been. Women, it was also agreed, had far more influence on the growing generation and thus potentially more power. Worry was expressed about the degeneration this influence might be suffering at the hands of the two-career family. I drew attention to the point in Laclos which said that those being oppressed can grow, "to like the condition and think it natural." The point was returned in the terms that this cannot always be the case or the reactions to oppression in China, South Africa or Eastern Europe would not have occurred. The role of economics in all this was thought to have a major influence - which might begin to modify the emphasis put on power earlier. The difference between Russia and China in their response to protest was seen in terms of who had and who had not seen the light. I asked, however, if struggles for liberation and freedom might be inevitably doomed to failure, whether the overthrow of one oppression might not simply be the dawn of a new one - in other words, might not Simone Weil be right after all?

The question then arose about the possibility of oppression in Western Europe and I pointed the group toward the

quotation from David Smith which, at the very least, indicates felt oppression. Current disputes around religious minorities in Britain came into the discussion at this point. The discussion also moved into the field of others who might be seen as being oppressed in Britain - and thus to prisoners and the quotation from Brendan Behan. If ever there was a power relationship, this was it. Is Behan describing a situation of oppression? Authority, it was felt, can lead many quite naturally into the role of oppressor. The other thing which can have this effect is fear (and here we begin to cover the same territory as Group A). Everybody in this situation is living some kind of fear - and somebody is almost bound to be oppressed.

In the third question much time was spent initially on matters related to what Boesak and Wallis were saying about poverty and thus oppression being the fault of others. We debated various definitions of what affluence might be which tended to relate wealth or its lack to what one person perceived as being normal or even attainable in any particular society - thus affluence, like poverty in the first study, became relative. Such a view, of course, steers clear of exactly what Boesak and Wallis are trying to say - that the affluence of some can be oppression for unseen others. When the conversation moved on to people doing what they liked with their own money and sharing being a matter for individual decision, I asked if that

were not saying just what Nyerere was arguing against - alms-giving. When considering what he had to say, however, the basic question came up about what might constitute the justice of which he speaks. This produced a discussion on international trade and whether or not it represented fair dealing. The idea (discussed among others) of paying more for tea was thought to be dubious because the increased earnings of pickers would make it more likely that owners would bring in machines to do the same job.

It was interesting in all this that a discussion which was meant to be on oppression had become so concentrated on economics - considering that, as in the previous group, the issue of wealth had been deemed to be not so central as Hanks and Tamez had tried to make it. I moved things more pointedly on to oppression and the church by turning to Cosmas Desmond. He received much more ready support here than he had in Group A - even when I tried to raise the stakes by suggesting that he was saying that not only could those who are not oppressed not understand the situation of those who are; but that they could not understand their own situation properly either. Even this was not opposed.

If, however, Desmond received more support in this group, Archer received less. Here the idea of the churches supporting and sustaining the interests of the powerful was much more of a problem than it had been in Group A. Much of the discussion of what Archer was saying concentrated on

the fact that he was referring specifically to the Roman Catholic Church, rather than on his implied criticism of all British churches (despite my repeated attempts to bring the discussion back to this point). Eventually we came round to asking if the Church of Scotland was, in this sense, an 'establishment' church. The answer given was that there are bits which are certainly not (such as the Church and Nation committee) and other parts which are.

3) Group C:

Here there was reluctance to accept that oppression was simply in the nature of things (Weil) except in the sense, perhaps, that people are by nature sinful and therefore likely to oppress others. It was thought by some that in Third World countries poverty and oppression were indeed part of the fabric - although others wanted to ask who had woven it in. The discussion turned here, as it had in the other groups, to oppression in Eastern Europe (inevitably, since the focus of so much of the news had been on that area for months) and particularly to Romania. When asked about the role of wealth and the desire for it in the creation of this oppression, the first response of the group was to add, as other groups had, the equal significance of power. The second response, however, was to say that in this country wealth was indeed the most

significant factor - this point of view coming primarily from a woman who works in welfare rights. Having been given this lead, others in the group expanded the idea by pointing to Ethiopia where the greed of a ruling elite prevents the hungry being fed. (This was a lead not given in the other two groups but it clearly opened up a new channel of thought here. It is perhaps the case that a personal experience was brought to bear here in a way which rang bells with others and enabled them to see wider issues in the light of what they knew from experience. Two issues therefore arise: one is that of whether the move from personal experience to wider understanding is automatic or not - a person acting as a catalyst seemed necessary here; the other issue is that of whether the same comments made in the other groups would have had the same effect - does the environment in which a catalyst works have a determining influence?)

I asked, when we came to the second question, if all those mentioned in the various quotations were indeed victims of oppression - starting with the prisoners mentioned in the passage by Brendan Behan. Seeing prisoners as oppressed, even under the conditions of bullying and violence described in the passage, depended on why those prisoners were there - what had they done? If they had been put away for an offence which was violent, for example, there was a general feeling that they deserved anything they had coming to them. "If it was a person who had murdered your kid,

you would want him to be slapped about every day." The real oppression of prisoners however, some said, was the fact of their helplessness in the face of whatever society decided to throw at them - they could not run away and they were not allowed to resist. Political prisoners were put in a different category from others in the sense that they were more deserving of our attention and sympathy. I asked about the fate of ex-prisoners and some responded by saying that their experience was a difficult one, while others did not reckon that their situation could be classed as one of oppression.

We moved on to women and their 'oppression'; had things changed since 1783? The relevance of the quotation to the present day was thought to depend upon where one looked - the first example given of where it moght be particularly relevant was that of India. The conversation moved very quickly, however, from this to the male language of the Bible. I pointed to the changes made to this by the REB but participants were dubious about this - believing these to be the result of modern thought being imposed upon the original text rather than the result of better textual scholarship. The thought had become deeply embedded that women did not matter in the eyes of God. It was interesting to note that the one man in the group was the one most willing to say that many women are still oppressed by men. The women were more willing to blame the previous generation (women as well as men) for sexual stereotyping

and its results in the position of women in society. The current position, in fact, was characterized by an increasing pressure on women to go out to work and also be the perfect homemaker. "It's difficult trying to win." I asked if a situation in which one could not win might not be a reasonable working definition of oppression. The answer, it was said, lies in the ability to choose - with the realisation that such a choice was not at present universally available. Positive discrimination was not seen, however, as a good way toward providing that choice since the best person should be employed no matter their race or gender. This was not to deny the existence of 'negative discrimination' but it was to deny the benefits of replacing one kind of discrimination with another.

Oppression of 'ethnic minorities' came next - did it exist? The existence of barriers and of immigrants keeping themselves to themselves was mentioned without an answer to the question of who creates those barriers. The group discussed the idea of 'swamping' without actually dismissing it out of hand. I asked about the minister from Kenya who had worked in this area and about how he had been received. The answer was that he had been received well by the congregation but that he had been the subject of racist abuse by others. (This came as news to some in the group who were shocked and saddened by it.) I suggested that, following Ezekiel, we might think of why it was often those at the bottom of the social ladder who resorted to racism

as a support for their own self-esteem. It was a thought that the group did not feel able to expand upon.

I asked about what had been brought up in the other groups - the issue of fear in oppression, and this was done in the context of the quotation from Frank Chicane. An immediate reaction was to class those who ran the state of emergency to which Chicane refers as 'big bullies' - sated with power and in fear of losing it (if in fear of anything at all). A similarity was seen between this and the situation in China described by Michael Fathers and Andrew Higgins. I then asked if there were people not represented in the material provided who might be thought of as being oppressed. The answer was that anyone might be who departed from what was thought of as the norm - such as gay men and lesbians; or (this with more support) those who are vulnerable such as children. When asked if the participants themselves might be classed as being in this category, replies tended to be in terms of financial well-being and therefore as being comparative. Again definitions came back to the role of power and to the thought that those who are oppressed are those who lack power (such as social security claimants or even patients).

When asked, in response to the third question and in particular about Anthony Archer's assertion that the church is predominantly middle-class and serves the interests of

the powerful, the group gave responses which indicated in general that the church was too interested in serving its own interests, looking in on itself rather than being concerned with either spiritual growth or social justice. This led on to a discussion of how various people in the group have themselves felt oppressed in the church by what they understand other people's attitudes to be about the behaviour of their children or the way they dressed. I asked if part of this general attitude of 'respectability' which had been being described was involved in what Nyerere was speaking against when he wanted to put justice ahead of almsgiving - was almsgiving a way of working in the interests of the powerful? The power relationship involved in the exercise of charitable work was recognized and those in the group wanted to say that charity was not enough. Not everyone, however, was thinking along the same lines. Some were thinking of developmental aid being preferable to straightforward emergency aid; but at least one, a recent convert to Christianity, was thinking of spiritual direction as being a necessary concommitant of material assistance.

The quotation from Jim Wallis about the responsibility of the rich for the suffering of the poor produced little reaction save to say that many in the church would not see things that way. I linked what he had to say with what Cosmas Desmond maintains in the context of South Africa - that the oppressors cannot even interpret the gospel. Such

a linkage would imply that any church in the affluent countries of the world would be unable to interpret the gospel. I then asked for a response in terms of different churches within Edinburgh - could churches in affluent areas of the city say anything about poverty, must opinion be derived from experience? The answer was that you really cannot understand poverty without experiencing it. Did this make a difference to the understanding of the faith? Yes, it did - because it made you want to take Jesus at his word and take the good news to the poor. This was taken further by the suggestion that those who have experienced poverty are especially called to this task. Suffering is used by God to bring help to the sufferers - by way of the strengthened faith of those who have gone through it before. When pushed to expand on this, participants retreated slightly from the position which seemed to be developing by saying that not only those who had experienced poverty could understand it, but also those who had seen it (or at least some of them).

DISCUSSION

Within these discussions there were some similarities but also some notable differences. The obvious similarity among all the groups was their identification of power as the most important factor generating oppression. Two

points come out from this: firstly, there is the comparison between this and the discussion of poverty in the first study where only Group C was really willing to take on board power as a significant issue; the second is that the groups in this discussion, even though they started off by talking about power, all ended up on a line of debate which involved wealth, poverty and economic issues generally. We might be left with an unresolved choice between the use of power expressed economically, and the use of power to generate and maintain wealth. If we go along with the textual work accomplished by Hanks and Tamez, we will see that the bible takes the view that wealth is the determining factor and that power is its expression or its tool. In the light of the discussions described above, however, we might question if this interpretation matches experience in this country or impressions here of what happens in the rest of the world.

A second similarity is the universal unease with Simone Weil's statement which consigned oppression to the way the world is. The similarity continues, however, in the subsequent attempts to say that the way the world is or, more accurately, the way people are within it can lead to oppression through the human desire to dominate or compete. It seems that there might be more to what Weil had to say than most people thought at first glance - and that 'more' might be best described as 'sin'. It is, I feel, when we begin to take sin seriously, and see poverty and oppression

as its manifestations, that we begin to see the 'politics' of liberation theology as being, after all, properly 'theological'. The groups in their discussions all began to make this connection without it ever being said in so many words. Perhaps, then, we are seeing the beginnings of a cross-cultural opening which is being provided for politics by theology. Perhaps also there is an opening here for further examination of the claim made in the previous study in Group A that sin and suffering must have some kind of bearing on one another.

Another theme which had some claim to common currency was that of fear. Oppression and fear were linked to some extent by all groups with the fear being seen as the reaction of the oppressor. This arose with reference to South Africa, to China, to prisons. The group, however, which showed the smallest amount of enthusiasm for this was Group C where it was I, in the light of previous discussions, who raised it. Even then it was accepted more out of politeness than conviction. In Group C the emphases were far more on the powerlessness and poverty of the oppressed than on the fear on the part of the oppressors - such a fear was given the benefit of the doubt concerning its existence but it produced little sympathy. Sympathy would hardly, either, be the word to describe the reaction in Group B but there was, nevertheless, a recognition of the role that fear can play among those who have privilege or wield authority. Group C had little or no time for such

recognition - to them what was important was the objective fact, not the subjective motivation. This came out very clearly when discussing the treatment of claimants by the staff at the DSS: when I asked about the continued existence of floor-to-ceiling barriers between staff and claimants, the comments which that elicited were not about the staff being afraid of the claimants but rather that the reason they were there was that the staff were so nasty.

Some of the most interesting comments, and indeed most interesting differences, were produced by the quotation from Cosmas Desmond about the interpretation of the gospel. The three groups produced quite different responses. Group A was unwilling to accept Desmond's restriction of the white church to a listening role while Group B was unconcerned by its implications. Group C used this quotation to begin to develop the idea that the poor and the suffering were God's special messengers to the oppressed. The thought was not developed to any great extent (and indeed was retracted slightly lest it be seen as unfair or arrogant) but we must at this stage begin to wonder if the concept after which they were grasping was not in fact very near the concept used in liberation theology of the epistemological privilege of the poor. Of course, what Cosmas Desmond was suggesting went rather further: he was suggesting that not only are the poor and oppressed God's messengers to the poor and oppressed but that they are also God's messengers to the rich and the

oppressors.

The final point which can be made here concerns reactions to Anthony Archer and his claim that the Catholic church in England, like other denominations, defends the status quo and the current arrangements of society - thus working in the interests of the powerful. It was here that the different experiences of the groups came into clear relief. In Group A the basic middle-class nature of the church was recognized (particularly by the man who, in a sense, has a foot in both camps by being seconded from one congregation to another). In Group B, on the other hand, the opinion was confirmed in this discussion which had arisen earlier in the series that such a designation was an artificial construct, not an objective description of reality. The participants in Group B were being a little more consistent here than those in Group A since they had always questioned the relevance of a class analysis of the church. Group A, however, had previously been far from unanimous about class as a useful tool of analysis and yet now was quite willing to accept Archer's point. This may be another example of the willingness of people to accept an idea if given a reasonably specific context in which to set it, while being not so willing to take on board an abstract generalization. Group C provided a quite different slant on the whole idea by interpreting the middle-classness of the church in terms of its obsession with appearance and organization, with committees and cups of tea. Thus were they able to

translate the notion of the middle-class ethos of the church even into the working-class environment of their own surroundings. In doing this they were, I feel, coming closest to the point which Archer was trying to make and closest to the basis upon which he builds his description of this as oppression. We are also faced here with perhaps the best confirmation so far of the existence of a dominant ideology upon which church life is founded - and the existence of varying responses to that ideology.

Study Four - Exodus 3:7-12

"The Lord said, "I have witnessed the misery of my people in Egypt and have heard them crying out because of their oppressors. I know what they are suffering and have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that country into a fine, broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the territory of Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perrizites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Now the Israelites' cry has reached me, and I have also seen how hard the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I shall send you to Pharoah, and you are to bring my people Israel out of Egypt." "But who am I," Moses said to God, "that I should approach Pharoah and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" God answered, "I am with you. This will be your proof that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God here at this mountain."

1. What does liberation mean for the oppressed?

"God is not indifferent to the groans of the Hebrews. He cares for them. He wishes them to have life and freedom. He sees their helplessness and calls forth a leader to take them away from slavery to a land where freedom and abundance are promised ... God does not save his people without their participation. He calls Moses to be their leader. God's plan has to do with the material reality of his people's life, its suffering and liberation. It is thoroughly this-worldly. It has to do with the masses, their economic and social relationships and their rulers." (Balasuriya, 1979, p.155)

"The Exodus is the long march towards the promised land in

which Israel can establish a society free from misery and alienation. Throughout the whole process, the religious event is not set part. It is placed in the context of the entire narrative, or more precisely, it is its deepest meaning. It is the root of the situation. In the last instance, it is in this event that the dislocation introduced by sin is resolved and justice and injustice, oppression and liberation are determined. Yahweh liberates the Jewish people politically in order to make them a holy nation." (Gutierrez, 1974, p.157)

Even the oppressed do not always respond gladly to the call for liberation ... The oppressed sometimes want quick and easy results. They are dispirited by failure. Their oppression, internalized over a long period of time - like the four hundred years of the Jews in Egypt - breeds a mentality of dependence. They tend to distrust leaders who emerge from among themselves." (Balasuriya, 1979, p.157)

"For the rebellious peasants of Israel, God has revealed himself in Egypt as a liberator, and they found it impossible to worship Yahweh and also accept the kings who were exploiting and enslaving them." (Pixley, 1981, p.101)

2. <u>What does liberation mean for the oppressors?</u>

Yahweh is just, because he has compassion on those who suffer and intervenes to deliver them from oppression; the Pharoah and his people are unjust because they oppress and harass and abuse and enslave." (Miranda, 1977, p.99)

"After each plague the pharoah first relented but later hardened his heart. He tried to win over the Israelites with partial solutions and palliatives - anything but an end to slavery and permission to leave Egypt. He permits the Israelites to leave only when the situation of his own

people becomes unbearable." (Balasuriya, 1979, p.157)

"The hardest truth to bear is the knowledge that one must love one's enemies and recognize in the most inhuman despot a man for whom Christ died." (Moore: in Elliott et.al., 1979, p.50)

"Liberation does not stand or fall with man's consciouness and power. It is not something that depends on the powers of man alone. It is rather the sole determination of the God who is the Suffering Slave. But in order to liberate the oppressed, the lamb must become a lion, the slave must become a warrior. The will to liberation expresses itself as power against those who make liberation impossible. Love for the oppressed is wrath against the oppressors." (Alves, 1969, p.124)

"[Black theology] burns to awaken the white man to the degradation into which he has fallen by dehumanizing the black man, and so is concerned for the liberation of the oppressor equally with that of the oppressed." (Tutu: in Parratt, 1987, p.54)

3. <u>What does Jesus mean by liberation?</u>

"When Jesus speaks of the 'poor' and the 'poor in spirit' and of the righteousness that shall be given them, He speaks of those who are socially oppressed, those who suffer from the power of injustice, those who depend upon Yahweh for their liberation." (Boesak: in Parratt, 1987, p.134)

"Because [Jesus] proclaimed the kingdom of God to the poor, he came into conflict with the rich. Because he gave the grace of God to sinners, he contradicted the laws of the pious, the Pharisees, and the Zealots. Because he revealed

God's lordship to the lowly and oppressed, Pilate let him be crucified in the name of the Roman Caesar-god. Thus eschatological anticipation inevitably brings forth historical resistance. Salvation can enter the situation of misery in no other way; liberation can enter into a world of oppression in no other way." (Moltmann, 1984, p.102f.)

"We have learned how, in the analysis made by the Jesus movement, the temple of Yahweh and its religion had become the principle enemies of the liberating kingdom of Yahweh. Then we saw how this rebellious message was deflected toward a religion that was individualistic, spiritualizing and ahistorical." (Pixley, 1981. p.102)

4. How can liberation occur today?

"The event of liberation indicates that a subversive power has been introduced into history, a power that negates and stops the old in order to make room for the creation of the new. Only when freedom becomes historical through power, through an activity that changes ... the conditions of history, is the history of bondage brought to a stop, thereby giving birth to the possibility of liberation. Through this activity, transcendence comes to the midst of life. And only as such, as a reality in the midst of life, is transcendence an element of the language of the community of faith, as it is determined by the historical experience of liberation." (Alves, 1969, p.123)

"Conversion to liberation entails an option for action, to change mentalities and social structures. It is a positive choice that is not generally considered to be a feature of the Christian life, or of baptism, though it should be." (Balasuriya, 1979, p.208)

"Only liberated people can be a 'land of the free'. But only oppressed and restless human beings are interested in liberation and exodus from slavery. America can expect its renewal ... from blacks, Indians, the poor, women, for they still have their exodus in freedom before them." (Moltmann, 1984, p.158)

The fourth study took attention on from the examination of what might be described as the 'problems' to some ideas of a 'solution'. Thus we moved to the theme of liberation as an answer to the previous themes of poverty, suffering and oppression. In order to do this we went to the biblical account so central to much liberation theology (especially in its early days) - that of the account of the exodus and, in particular, to the call of Moses since contained there are the reasons given for Yahweh's intervention. The passage chosen was Exodus 3.7-12 and, because it is so important in liberation theology, this study is far more exclusively concerned with what liberation theologians have to say than are any of the others.

1) Group A:

The first question concerned the nature of liberation for the oppressed. I asked first what those present thought of the idea from Balasuriya that liberation is "thoroughly this-worldly" and that from Gutierrez - that holiness proceeds from political liberation. The initial response

did not actually try to answer that directly but rather wanted to point out the dangers of liberation 'from' without liberation 'for'. Release from one set of structures does not of itself mean freedom if what replaces them is no better. His second point was that of the need for a leader in a movement for liberation, that people will not liberate themselves - thus God called Moses to fulfill this function. I tried to bring things back to my original question by asking if this is what we mean when we talk about liberation in church. The reply now was in the negative. The suggestion was made that, in fact, rather than improvement in one's material lot preceding liberation, it is quite the other way around - an experience of God's liberation might actually lead to material improvements in one's life. (What this comment ignored, of course, and what is also ignored by the first quotation from Balasuriya, is that in terms of material well-being the exodus meant increased hardship before any improvement was likely to appear.) The alleged link between liberation and material well-being was then further challenged by saying that happiness is not tied to wealth - although it was not clear at this point if the elder from the other church (who was making this point) was able to draw a distinction between wealth and sufficiency, a distinction which might have gone some way to healing the seeming rift between him and the quotations we had in front of us. He went on, however, to say that any improvement made a person feel good no matter where their starting

point might be.

I asked, on the basis that it had been claimed that liberation might precede what Balasuriya and Gutierrez were talking about, just what that liberation might entail. The answer was that it was "nearness to God". This entailed being liberated from concern for oneself, being given a broader horizon, being opened to others. Thus, it was said, liberation might not entail freedom from oppression. Liberation might mean understanding the people round about (and that was the kind of liberation thought to be needed in the group's area), although it might not mean doing anything specific as a result of that understanding. I asked if the opening to others being talked of could bring the nervousness to which Balasuriya refers in the second quotation. This, however, was not thought of as a problem - it being more likely that such a process would bring confidence.

Finally in the first section, little was made of the quotation from Pixley (which suggests a kind of revolutionary folk-memory which relativises all earthly authority) beyond a purely secular cynicism about rulers and politicians.

In question two I started here, as I did in the other groups, with the contrast between Alves and Tutu - and asked which they thought to be nearer the truth. (Moore

was linked with what Tutu says.) One response was that one of the most difficult things in life is to separate the sinner from the sin. (This question, indeed, determines a whole way of thinking about forgiveness or its lack: do we think of the person apart from what that person has done? are we what we do? is there a human 'essence' which transcends individual acts, no matter how evil?) This hesitation seemed to be pushing the contribution toward support for Alves. Even when the subject of Romania was introduced - and the summary execution of Ceaucescu - there was still a reluctance to be too forgiving when it came to oppressors. The whole question proved difficult to progress on since there seemed to be a feeling that what was being said and felt was not, perhaps, what ought to be being said and felt. The debate about justice, however, will continue in study five, chapter seven.

In view of what was said earlier about how liberation might be understood it was no surprise when Pixley's view of liberation was rejected. Moltmann's analysis raised the question of whether or not he was trying to say that "only if you're poor will you get anywhere". I suggested that the horizon of the kingdom presented by Jesus was, in today's church, largely absent with most church members being content with things as they are. The response was that there are indeed many in the church who are not content - but this discontent was defined in terms of individual achievement rather than in terms of quality of

communal life. In fact the tendency to see contentment in terms of communal life began to be explicitly rejected by the quotation of Jesus' saying that the poor are always with us - the poor being defined as those who have not made much progress in their relationship with God (a definition which began to verge on the Pelagian!). As an attempt to get away from some of the more extreme interpretations of what he had just said, this contributor then went on to talk of the need for education as a road out of poverty.

I asked if today's church was a centre of resistance to the values of today which detract from the values of the kingdom. The answer was that the liberation which can be found in the church was a release from worry and anxiety, but that there are many who sit in the pews and do nothing else - and for them there has been no liberation, no release, no joy or they would no longer be content to sit passively and do nothing more. They still have a need but have not found the answer to that need. This is how an attempt was made to account for those who come to church either regularly or intermittently but who appear to derive very little benefit from their attendance. (In this way, too, the beginnings of a theory were being developed which would justify earlier statements about liberation preceding other action and development: thus what was being said was that the church can never be a centre of resistance to the spirit of the times until those who attend have found the answer to their questions, have found the liberation which

will open their eyes to those around and lift their eyes to broader horizons and to the horizon of the kingdom. In fact it is an account of liberation which equates it with conversion - an equation with which, I feel, Moltmann would not be in complete disagreement. It does not, however, take account of Moltmann's insistence that salvation and liberation have an unavoidably confrontational and divisive aspect to them.)

When we moved on to the fourth and final question I asked if any of the authors quoted had come near hitting the nail on the head. The answer was that they all started from too materialistic a base. The suggestion from Moltmann that only those on the underside of life are interested in liberation was contradicted, it was said, by the fact that theologians (Moltmann included) obviously were interested. (Included here, I think, was also support from the elder from the other church for philanthropy and disinterested concern. I do not think, however, that Moltmann would argue about that - rather he would say that philanthropy and disinterested concern cannot be the engines which drive renewal. The point being made is consistent, though, with the recognition of the role of leadership mentioned right at the beginning of the study by the retired bus driver.)

We discussed Balasuriya's 'option for action' and the caveat was expressed that those being asked to make such a

promise would be too young (though we did not go on to ask if that meant our young people are being asked to promise other things at too early an age). The caution with the quotation from Alves was about the question of 'power' and with the down-to-earth idea of transcendence which seemed to be involved with his insistence on historicity.

The answer to the question about how liberation can occur today was, in other words, left unprovided - but that it can occur was positively supported. The material base of liberation remained consistently rejected in favour of a personal renewal which enables all else to take place.

2) Group B:

We started here with the quotation from Balasuriya which talked of liberation being thoroughly this-worldly. It was an attitude which was characterized as being typical of the 1960's when, it was said, the church began to see itself more as a social service than as having anything particularly spiritual to offer. Since then there has been a swing back to the more spiritual basis of former days. The question was asked if that dichotomy was not one favoured by evangelical and fundamentalist groups, and ought there not to be a middle way which denies the need for such a dichotomy? The next point was one about an increasing tendency, in this country and others, for the

church to be not only political but party political - "I often wonder how much of that is spiritually inclined." This was taken up 'from the other end' by a point criticising political parties who put the word 'Christian' in their title. Politics and Christianity have no direct relevance to one another in the sense that a Christian can interpret his or her faith in a variety of different political ways - which means that it is very suspect when a minister or priest becomes a politician (like Allan Boesak in South Africa). "But doesn't it depend how horrific the political issues are?"

The next contribution tried to bring the conversation to bear on our own country: in a situation where there are definite issues of oppression and freedom it may be obvious what liberation might be and even obvious that it should be this-worldly, but it is far more difficult to see what oppression or liberation might mean in this country where the practice of the churches seems far removed from the kind of situation the quotations are trying to address. The right, however, remains for any Christian or any Christian church to engage in politics provided Christ's kingdom has priority over party, said another. This speaker then went on to draw direct parallels between the situation on South Africa today and the exodus. (He had been in South Africa on national service and had very clear views on the bigoted nature of the country - but in previous comments had generally said that South Africa was

such a confusing situation it was difficult to know what to think. It was therefore interesting to hear him now produce such clearly defined parallels between that 'confusing' situation and the situation which led to the call of Moses.) Various examples were then given of places and people where the line between politics and church life has become blurred.

I asked about Gutierrez' point about political liberation producing a holy nation - were there situations where personal or national holiness was made impossible by the unholy environment in which it was set? The answer to this was immediately in the negative. The negative response, however, seemed to be based on an equation between 'political' (which is the term used by Gutierrez) and 'material', thus producing examples of rich atheists and poor saints. The example of the spirituality of black slaves in the United States perhaps began to come closer to the point but itself pointed up the presumption being made by all that 'holiness' was not something which could attach to a nation - a presumption not shared by Gutierrez. I asked, therefore, if a holy nation was simply a collection of holy individuals. One response was that the only way holiness can rise above the level of the individual was in a church rather than in a nation. The only type of nation where you could talk in these kind of terms, said another, is a monolithic society. Another person offered the examples of Poland and Iran as nations which might be

"holy" either by way of levels of religious affiliation or in terms of self-image. These were not explored further.

We went on to look at Balasuriya's thoughts around the resistance of the oppressed to liberation. The first situation brought up was the mentality of dependence in Russia where "people are so used to having things provided and not really thinking for themselves." There is in all of us, another said, a resistance to change which, in the case of the Israelites after 400 years in Egypt would have been well nigh impossible to move. People conform - otherwise the ordering of society would be impossible. The need, mentioned in Group A, was repeated here of leaders. We approached, indeed, an almost Leninist understanding of the need for a revolutionary vanguard.

The subject of the mentality of dependence having been raised, I asked what people thought of accusations levelled against Scotland which said that this was exactly our problem. One person was very strongly of the opinion that such an accusation was justified. He was asked by another member of the group to say why and responded not by arguing that Scotland had been molly-coddled but by saying that it could and ought to manage on its own. Another came nearer to the intentions of those who originally coined the description of Scotland as dependent when he referred to the high level of council housing as being one of its justifications. The discussion, however, did not come to

terms with the subject in a way which shed light on dependence in any broader context - rather it veered away in vaguely nationalist directions. (It might be worth at this juncture saying that, in Scotland, many would indeed equate talk of oppression and liberation with nationalism. When I gave a brief description of my area of study to a student from Africa his immediate thought was that I would be interpreting it thus. Might it be that the Scottish middle-class (or a sizable section of it) sees liberation in political rather than either spiritual or material terms - in spite of the confusion to which I referred concerning these terms earlier?)

When asked if today's church contained the kind of folk memory referred to by Pixley - a memory of God as liberator who relativizes all earthly authority. One interesting response said that this was not so in this country since the Queen was not only ruler but also defender of the faith - interesting because this was the same person who was highly dubious of political parties having the term 'Christian' in their title. Another response was that today there is not a conflict between earthly rule and obedience to God since we render to Caesar and to God what is appropriate to each.

In question two we started with the last two quotations and the contrast between them. Tutu produced agreement whereas Alves did not. Alves' "call to arms" was found difficult

to cope with by some although others recognized that there was a point when resort to force was at least understandable (a point with which, actually, Tutu would agree). I asked if this was relevant to Romania and if Ceaucescu would have been seen by his victims, in Moore's words, as a man for whom Christ died. Even in this context, however, the words of Tutu and Moore seemed more acceptable - Ceaucescu had degraded himself as much as he had degraded his victims. They were more acceptable also than Miranda whose analysis was questioned at the point where he says that Yahweh intervenes to deliver from oppression - it being Christians who must intervene at God's prompting.

In relation to Balasuriya's point about liberation for the oppressed having to be forced upon the oppressors, I asked if people thought this to be relevant to the current situation in South Africa and if the oppressors could see such a state of affairs as liberation also for them. The answer was that this would certainly not be the light in which it would be seen, and for some in the group the only answer for white South Africans was to get out now - because the day was not far off when they themselves would be terribly oppressed "because it has happened everywhere else." The man who earlier compared this situation with the exodus, now reverted to his previous position of finding it hard to understand - and indeed of having some sympathy with the position of the white population who

"were the first ones there." In the light of all this I raised with the group the question of whether the liberation of one is the liberation of all, or if perhaps the attempt to produce a non-confrontational theology of liberation was doomed to failure since those with privileges will not easily give them up. The only answer, it was suggested, was a holy nation. Another answer given, however, was that what was needed was a human nation - one in which the common humanity of all was recognized by all. The link, or lack of it, between political liberation and material prosperity again appeared with the recognition that in many parts of Africa the former meant the lack of the latter.

In the third question we looked first at Moltmann and discussed two ideas of the resistance to which he refers. The first was that eschatological anticipation produces among the lowly a resistance to oppression; the second that oppressors are moved to resistance to that very eschatological anticipation. On the second, it was said that power always hangs by a slender thread and that anything which suggests an alternative power abroad will be met with resistance from those hanging on to that thread (witness Herod's reaction to the wise men). I asked if there were powerful people around today who felt threatened by the claims of God's kingdom - and the answer from most was that unfortunately this was not so. Another response was that revolution is not necessarily change and that

change does not depend on revolution - hence the claims of the kingdom need not make the powerful tremble. Moltmann was accused of narrowing the argument to such an extent that it lost its claims to truth.

Pixley, on the other hand, gained a measure of support in his claim that the church had turned in on itself and started to ignore the historical conditions under which it existed - the example given being that of the churches, or most of them, in Germany under the Third Reich. Another claimed, however, that spiritualisation was not ahistorical or out of touch with reality - the answer given to this being that if you try to have "a structure which will encompass spirituality it becomes like a bird in a gilded cage - it won't work." The truth of Pixley's comment was not reckoned to relate to the level of its usefulness because the only practical outcome of taking it to heart would be to abandon organized religion.

The question was asked if Jesus ever did refer to liberation and the only way in to that seemed to the group members to be the passage which formed the first of these studies - referring to freedom to the captives and so on. "But was that physical or spiritual?" (See the account of the first study!)

Finally in this section, we heard an attack on Boesak as being simply wrong because he describes the poor in spirit

in such a way as to omit those such as Ceaucescu who was, if anybody was, poor in spirit. (This came from a man who, although he was at the introductory meeting, had since then been unable to attend for various reasons. He had therefore not been present during previous discussion of this phrase. What it did point up, however, was the continuing problem with this phrase and its near-universal misinterpretation. It is becoming increasingly clear that this phrase represents a real obstacle to the reception of the ideas of liberation theology.) On this basis, however, it was claimed that the dangers mentioned earlier of ministers becoming politicians were confirmed.

Alves' point about transcendence received its customary bemused reception. Much time, in this final section, was taken up by the use of the term 'power' which as usual was thought of as something of which to be wary, as something which in this context is probably to be taken as implying that the oppressed should in their turn become the oppressors. I asked if transcendence meant a power which overcomes and changes lives. The response was in terms of an alternative definition which involved a rising above.

We moved on to Balasuriya and Moltmann. ("I think we should get Mr. Moltmann round here and we'll sort him out!") It was argued that the abolition of slavery, for example, came from the top - the renewal did not have to come from underneath. Moltmann, it was thought, was saying

something which was simply not true and something which was unprovable. When asked about Balasuriya's option for action, one response was, "but we don't need conversion to liberation, do we? We accept that all people shoud be free." Another response was that religion is a personal thing which cannot be done on behalf of anyone else - thus it is actually something different from what most liberation theology is talking about because that refers to social structures and so on. All you can hope to change is yourself and the gospel only spreads by example. A third response was that it is no doubt our responsibility to try to change what needs to be changed, although the possibilities for each will be widely variant.

The question of social conditioning was raised (not by me!) in the sense that we expect what we have become accustomed to - thus in Britain we expect there to be voluntary organisations and charities for any problem which presents itself. This may not be so in other countries and thus other countries may not all have the opportunities for service which ours presents. Others thought that perhaps the differences, certainly within Europe, were not that great.

There was a final comment about people in this country living lives of quiet desperation, living on the streets, and so on. The group clearly felt the need to make it clear that their earlier comments should not be taken as

individualist complacency or lack of social concern. There was a thought that poverty in the Third World, being more evenly spread over the population (or at least more widely spread), might not bring with it the feeling of degradation which it brings in this country. I asked if this was a consequence of freedom in the industrialized 'west' - individualism taken to lengths which take no account of a person's ability to cope. An answer given was that the reason in this country was secularization - freedom from religious dogma and obligation.

3) Group C:

Here again, I asked about the assertion that liberation is this-worldly. The dependence of spiritual liberation upon political liberation was challenged on the grounds that many people through the centuries, not least in our own, have endured persecution and enormous hardship without losing their faith or doubting the promise of salvation. I asked if people in the kind of situation being described would think of themselves as being saved or if they would cry out to God for him to save them. Are they liberated already or awaiting that liberation? The answer from the woman in the group who was a recent convert to Christianity was that they are already free and would feel themselves to be so. The mind, the heart and the soul are safe even when

the body is not. We then moved on to the question of how God saves and liberates - does he, as Balasuriya claims, depend on his people to accomplish it in his name? The answer was that he does need our participation - but it is up to us to ask him to use us. (This, of course, raises the question which was not explored further here of the possibility that God uses people without them knowing it. In study five we certainly come across the thought that people meet God without knowing it.)

The next topic was that of the reluctance referred to of the oppressed to be liberated in certain situations. There seemed to be a widespread recognition of this as a real part of life - a reluctance to face the unknown and a favouring of what is familiar despite any shortcomings the familiar may have. Again there was raised here, as in the other groups, the need for an outside influence - a leader, a liberator. Such an outside influence can help sights to be raised above the daily grind. The recent convert related this to her "step of faith" which had, she said, been a big step. "It's hard. You've got to have guts to do it." There is a fear of looking a fool.

I asked if they might recognize the same phenomenon in the situation of domestic violence where, despite conditions and treatment which are quite intolerable, the victim of that violence will not leave. Reasons given for remaining were fear of retribution, fear of losing face, fear of

having to cope and, finally, the answer that marriage is 'for better or for worse'. The discussion showed, however, that domestic violence (either verbal or physical) was really quite prevalent - everyone knew of a marriage where this kind of thing went on. (In the previous study there had been an almost unanimous rejection of the idea that these days women are oppressed - again we come up against a recurring theme: that of the ability to recognize something in the concrete instance which is not recognizable in the generalised abstraction.) This, too, seemed to be a case where the oppressed could not liberate themselves.

The quotation from Pixley drew a contrast between Scotland and England - the point being made being in terms of the demerits of establishment. There was little else, however, which came from it.

We arrived next at the contrast between Tutu and Alves. I asked what the Christian attitude to oppressors ought to be: "Is Alves being too nasty or is Tutu being too nice?" When offered the example of, as in the other groups, Ceaucescu, the group reckoned that few if any of those who suffered under him would see him in the way Moore says we should see tyrants - such an attitude being more easily assented to in words than in action. The difference between Alves and Tutu was then interpreted in terms of stages - that Tutu's remarks are to be followed up to a

certain point but beyond that point, when oppression continues unabated, the point of view Alves takes begins to carry more and more credence.

The comparison was made here as it was in Group B between the exodus and the situation in South Africa - here in relation to the minimalist nature of concessions on the part of those in power, seeing how little they can get away with. I asked if this kind of analysis can be used when we look at industrial relations. It was reckoned to apply at least to bad employers.

In the third question we looked at Moltmann's comments and ran into the objection that Jesus got into trouble not because of what he said to the lowly but rather because of what he said to the mighty - the Pharisees and so on. The idea was also questioned which says that the kingdom was proclaimed primarily to the poor. It was thought better to say that the kingdom was proclaimed to everyone but that only some heard and understood. We returned (again!) to the idea of the poor in spirit, and I referred them to Boesak's definition of the poor in spirit - this was accepted without challenge but, due to previous misunderstandings surrounding this phrase, I am not entirely sure that it was understood. Pixley's comment on the church was accepted as accurate but with no great feeling that it should be regarded as a problem, more a fact of life which could only be overcome by "regular

revolutions" (ecclesia semper reformanda).

The fourth question brought us to Balasuriya and his recommendation of an option for action being taken at baptism. The first response to this was that this could mean the opportunity at baptism (for an adult) to make a personal declaration of faith as an encouragement to others to change. The second response was that anyone taking their faith seriously, reading the gospels and acting on what they found there, would have to have this option as part of their faith in any case. This question also brought us to Moltmann's ideas that the downtrodden have the liberation of a society as their rsponsibility or calling. Here we arrived at a link with the comments on the need for leadership made earlier in this group and also in others. The model being suggested was that the downtrodden may have much to teach but that they needed helped or led to say it. There is a role, therefore, for those who are not oppressed in helping the oppressed to find their voice - the greatest encouragement to which will be the knowledge that when that voice is used there will be ears to hear. Without this model working, the group agreed, the oppressed are more likely to slip back into the suspicion of liberation which was mentioned earlier - and thus a whole society will stagnate for want of the renewal coming from below which Moltmann deems to be necessary. (This is the group, however, which in study three thought that the oppressed and the suffering had a special calling

to minister to the oppressed and the suffering.)

In order to fathom something of what Alves had to say we went into what people might think 'transcendence' might mean - it seemed, in one phrase, "an awful grand word." One definition was that it was God changing a person into someone new - and thus an experience of personal liberation. There was more dubiety about the societal dimension to this although there seemed to be a feeling that such a dimension could be regarded as the same process - writ large.

DISCUSSION

The most immediately obvious similarity between the groups in this study is their various comments on the role of leadership in liberation. The interesting point is that the topic arose in different places in the study but that, despite this, the comments had a common thread running through them. That thread was that the oppressed cannot liberate themselves. It is a thread which started in the text with the call of Moses to lead the people out of slavery but it went on to be developed in other ways. One of these, as I mentioned when talking about Group B, was what I described as very near Leninism - let me demonstrate what I mean:

> "The Social-Democrat's ideal should not be a trade union secretary, but a tribune of the people, able to

> react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it takes place, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; he must be able to generalize all these manifestations to produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation..."
> from "What Is To Be Done?", V.I. Lenin, 1975, p.99.

What began to appear is in the discussions was just this kind of leadership recognizing what Lenin spells out in the same book - that the oppressed cannot liberate themselves. In Group C there developed the quite intricate network of relationships which I described earlier which took seriously Moltmann's analysis of the process of societal renewal (not taken seriously in Group B) but which nevertheless allowed an empowering or enabling role for those who are not oppressed. All this provides an interesting look at liberation theology both in the context of Scotland and in its original Latin American context. Such a need for leadership is at least partly present in Daniel Levine's cautionary remark about liberation theology, when he writes:

> "despite its claims to address popular aspirations and to arise in some sense out of the experience of the poor, liberation theology remains a set of ideas created and advanced mostly by intellectuals." (Levine, 1986, p.244.)

What Levine seems to be saying is that the theologians claim not to be leaders when really they are or are trying to be; what we might say is that the analysis provided by the groups taking part in this study suggests that such leadership is neither to be denied nor to be denigrated because it is necessary. It was unclear if the groups in Edinburgh were suggesting that the church might have a role

in this leadership but it might nevertheless be taken that such a state of affairs is not beyond the bounds of possibility.

The second facet of these discussions which merits examination is the confusion which at times appeared between political and material interpretations of liberation. The presumption appeared to be, certainly in Groups A and B, that 'political' and 'material' meant more or less the same thing. In fact, as I pointed out earlier, the story of the exodus makes it very clear that they are different - at the very least they are different stages, but perhaps also they are more fundamentally different. It might perhaps be argued that an equation of political with material liberation is a way of bringing the societal to the level of the individual. Thus these two dichotomies might be seen simply as different facets of the same reality. They might both be evidence of the individualisation of which Pixley writes. The question in liberation theology with which many post-enlightenment westerners have the greatest difficulty is the question of seeing salvation and liberation in terms which are wider than individual - and the difficulty is, of course, greatest within Protestantism. Anything which might take these processes out of the exclusive realm of the individual tends to be regarded as taking them out of the realm of the spiritual. Group C was where ideas of communality in the working of God received least opposition

- but even there it was not totally absent.

Tied in with this also is the difficulty so obviously experienced by many (probably most) in seeing liberation in physical terms. 'Physical' ties in with material more clearly than it does with political, but it adds another aspect to the associations which cause difficulty. All these words, then: political, material, physical, social, combine to provide an accumulated meaning which is difficult to fit in to an inherited understanding which emphasises what Pixley identified - a faith which is individualised, spiritualised, ahistorical. This difficulty will make the emphases of the three previous studies a puzzle to some, a stumbling-block to others.

One more aspect of this gathering cloud of difficulties is the suggestion most notably by Alves but just as firmly by Moltmann and others that liberation is fundamentally confrontational and divisive. Study five, based on the sheep and the goats, will explore this further but it is worth mentioning here that the idea of the liberation of the downtrodden having dire consequences for the oppressors - and that at the instigation of God - comes into the same general area of anxiety as do the other problems mentioned above. The question, of course, is: are there differences in the anxiety levels in different places and, if so, why?

Finally, the story of the exodus brought up an issue which is central to all biblical interpretation - that of the ability to understand the universal in the light of the particular. If such a process were not possible, any application of biblical insight in the present day would be impossible. During this study two different people in two different groups made the link between the exodus from Egypt and the approaching liberation of black South Africa - and yet the further step (which ought to have been easier) of making the link from there to the liberation of all people everywhere seemed in fact to be harder.

Study Five - Matthew 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne, with all the nations gathered before him. He will separate people into two groups, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; he will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, "You have my Father's blessing; come take possession of the kingdom that has been made ready for you since the world was made. For when I was hungry, you gave me food; when thirsty, you gave me drink; when I was a stranger, you took me into your home; when naked, you clothed me; when I was ill you came to my help; when in prison, you visited me." Then the righteous will reply, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and fed you, or thirsty and gave you a drink, a stranger and took you home, or naked and clothed you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and come to visit you?" And the king will answer, "Truly I tell you: anything you did for one of my brothers here, however insignificant, you did for me." Then he will say to those on his left, "A curse is on you; go from my sight to the eternal fire that is ready for the devil and his angels. For when I was hungry, you gave me nothing to eat; when thirsty, nothing to drink; when I was a stranger you did not welcome me; when I was naked you did not clothe me; when I was ill or in prison, you did not come to my help." And they in their turn will reply, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and did nothing for you?" And he will answer, "Truly I tell you: anything you failed to do for one of these, however insignificant, you failed to do for me." And they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous will enter eternal life."

1. What is justice for the rich and the poor?

"Jesus preached this parable to help us to remember that the struggle against injustice is the criterion for our faith. The message of the parable is so clear that no one should be surprised when the Church, like Jesus, says to the goats: 'To hell with you'." (Rowland and Corner, 1990, p.11)

"Insofar as dealings with those who are 'low' on the social scale are concerned, Matthew 18:1-14 and 25:31-46 may be summarized as follows. Within the community social distinctions must be eliminated (18:1-14); independently of whther or not they belong to the community, all who are in distress must be recipients of active mercy (25:31-46)." (L.Schotroff: in Schotroff, W. and Stegemann, 1984, p.144)

"The fact that differentiating wealth is unaquirable without violence and spoliation is presupposed by the Bible in its pointed anathemas against the rich; therefore almsgiving is nothing more than restitution of what has been stolen, and thus the Bible calls it justice ... Matthew leaves no room for doubt when he explains and thematically attempts to delineate what justice is, that is, what makes some just and others not, in Matthew 25:31-46." (Miranda, 1977, p.19)

"Disapproval of making money, providing it were put to good uses, ... never formed a part of the Puritan ethic. On the contrary, the genuinely devout man would exhibit diligence in accumulating and prudence in spending - all to the greater glory of God." (Owen, 1964, p.13)

"[This class is] recruited from the incapable or immoral who have fallen out of the ranks of respectable labour ... For the adult members of the class the old remedy would have been a sound whipping at the cart-tails; and it would

be worth while to try one or two experiments of the kind on bodies proverbially suited to them." (The Times, 6th February 1886)

2. How does justice relate to faith?

"Who are the 'blessed' of the Father? The criterion employed by Jesus is not at all that which theologians eagerly use, and there is something about it which at first glance is baffling. Jesus does not say what we should have expected: 'Those who have believed on me,' or again, 'Those who have faithfully served the Church and frequented the sacraments.' No. He says, 'I was hungry and you gave me food.' The 'righteous' to whom he speaks - and they could well be pagans - have no consciousness of ever having done this ... The total teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and the whole of Jesus' severity toward the Pharisees have already indicated that the children of God are recognized by the way in which they practice mercy, and that it is by this fundamental attitude that they will be judged. He who does not love may hold the most orthodox beliefs, but he is still in death (see I John 2:9-11)." (de Dietrich, 1961, p.131f.)

"God, the unconditional, is to be found only in, with and under the conditioned relationships of this life: for he is their depth and ultimate significance. And this receives specifically Christian expression in the profoundly simple 'parable' of the Sheep and the Goats. The only way in which Christ can be met, whether in acceptance or rejection, is through 'the least of his brethren'." (Robinson, 1963, p.60f.)

"The text is one of the many in the gospels that underscore the importance of action on behalf of the poor in the following of Jesus ... But there is something distinctive

in the passage from Matthew: it reminds us that what we do to the poor we do to Christ himself. It is this fact that gives action on behalf of the poor its decisive character and prevents it from being taken simply as an expression of the 'social dimension' of the faith." (Gutierrez, 1984, p.104)

"Men already partly accept communion with God, although they do not explicitly confess Christ as their Lord, insofar as they are moved by grace, sometimes secretly, to renounce their selfishness, and seek to create an authentic brotherhood among men. They reject union with God insofar as they turn away from the building up of this world, do not open themselves to others, and culpably withdraw into themselves (Matthew 25:31-46)." (Bishops of Latin America: in Gutierrez, 1974, p.151)

3. Are there implications for social justice?

"In Matthew 25 it is the nations, not individuals, who are called to account for the extent to which they have met the needs of people. Only a society which recognizes this responsibility for the corporate meeting of needs can be a moral society. A society which recognizes need as a principle of distribution must ensure that the indirect exchanges between strangers mediated by the institutions of the society protect the dignity of both parties to the exchange." (Forrester and Skene, 1988, p.84)

"According to the system of natural liberty, the sovereign has only three duties to attend to ... first, the duty of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies; secondly, the duty of protecting, as far as possible, every member of the society from the injustice or oppression of every other member of it, or the duty of erecting and maintaining certain public

works and certain public institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or small number of individuals, to erect and maintain; because the profit could never repay the expense to any individual or small number of individuals, though it may frequently do much more than repay it to a great society." (Adam Smith, 1961, vol.II, p.207f.)

"Who are under judgement? V.32 says 'all the nations', but the actual judgement which follows is plainly of individual persons. In the light of this ... the referencemust be not to nations as opposed to individuals, but to Gentiles as opposed to Jews ... Gentiles who have not encountered Christ himself will be judged on the basis of their behaviour towrds him in the persons of his disciples. That 'least' means these, and not suffering humanity in general (an edifying thought often read into the text) is borne out by the 'little ones' of 18:6,10,14, and above all by 10:42 of which the whole scene is really an extended dramatization." (H.Benedict Green, 1975, p.206)

4. Is it possible for us to live justly?

"Without charity, knowledge is apt to be inhuman; without knowledge, charity is foredoomed, all too often, to impotence. In a society such as ours - a society of enormous numbers subordinated to an over-expanding and almost omnipresent technology - a new Gandhi, a modern St. Francis needs to be equipped with much more than compassion and seraphic love. He needs a degree in one of the sciences and a nodding aquaintance with a dozen disciplines beyond the pale of his own special field. It is only by making the best of both worlds - the world of the head no less then the world of the heart, that the twentieth century saint can hope to be effective." (Aldous Huxley: in Dolci, 1960, p.11)

Jesus also opens to us a future that matches our efforts to make our world a place better conformed to his regime of love. All those who, like Jesus, have lived for the coming of God's reign will rise with him. The people he will raise up to eternal life will be all those who have welcomed the stranger, visited the sick and the prisoner, or brought any slightest bit of love into our world, even though they may not have thought of themselves as imitating Jesus. By their actions they are already preparing the way, in hope, for the new earth and the new heaven in which God will dwell with humankind." (Bakole Wa Ilunga, p.119f.)

"Amos denounced the man who had a town house and a summer cottage in the country because he was careless of his fellow citizen's poverty, contributed to it, and benefitted from it. It was not wealth per se that he condemned but the inability or unwillingness of the well-to-do even to see the needy. The physical arrangements of housing in Scotland, as in other parts of the world, too often qualify for the comment that 'those in darkness you don't see'. Comfortable blindness protects those who would rather not know about conditions in some parts of our own country any more than about the shanty-towns of the Third World. Complacency, in the Church as well as outside it, can find many excuses." (Church and Nation Ctte., 1988, p.12)

"Only as we feel the presence of the incarnate God in the form of a poor Galilean can we begin to understand his words: 'I was hungry ...'. We cannot know. We can only look on the poor and oppressed with new eyes and resolve to heal their hurts and help end their oppression. If Jesus' saying in Matthew 25:40 is awesome, its parallel is terrifying. 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of my brethren, you did it not to me' (v.45). What does that mean in a world where millions die each year while rich Christians live in affluence? What does it mean te see the Lord of the universe lying by the road side

starving and walk by on the other side? We cannot know. We can only pledge, in fear and trembling, not to kill him again." (Sider, 1977, p.62)

The fifth study concentrated on an alternative way of looking at what might be a solution to poverty, suffering and oppression - and this alternative was 'justice'. The question had already been raised, of course, of whether liberation meant different things for oppressor and oppressed (and if liberation for the oppressed might mean, in Alves' phrase, wrath against the oppressor). Here, however, the focus moved to all of us - even to those who might not see themselves as either oppressed or as oppressing. (Karen Lebacqz, 1987, suggests that someone such as herself might be both oppressed and oppressing, but does not seem to take account of those who might be neither.) The biblical focus for this discussion was the parable of the sheep and the goats - Matthew 25.31-46.

1) Group A:

I asked first if the first question was itself a fair one - can one make this distinction between the rich and the poor. The initial response was that in days gone by there have certainly been whole classes of people who have been denied basic justice - and that this may very well be the

case still, "it's just that we don't see it." I pointed then to Miranda and his equation of the rich with the goats and asked if they agreed with this. This, it was thought was rather sweeping. We all are guilty of sins of omission at times but the same people who built up debits in this way on one side might also be building up credit on the other. We do not love all our neighbours all the time.

The contrast was then drawn between Miranda and Owen on the value or otherwise of accumulating wealth. This produced from the 'visiting' elder a comparison between capitalism and communism in which he said that capitalism actually had the better record in practice when it came to creating wealth but that it also had a great tendency to create greed (witness Saunders and his accomplices at Guiness - already incredibly wealthy but hell-bent on becoming wealthier still). This led another to suggest that perhaps Miranda was right to say that wealth is only acquirable by violence and despoliation. The reply to this was that this is how the capitalist system works (buying cheap and selling dear) but that, despite its theoretical imperfections, was capable of working for the good of all. This produced agreement to the extent that profit was necessary for money to be available for the relief of suffering.

I asked about the idea of eternal condemnation which is a part of this biblical passage - and to which Rowland and

Corner draw our attention. The visiting elder thought it was simply unChristian. The former bus-driver compared it to the old education system where those deemed unworthy of further attention were banished to a far corner of the classroom and henceforth ignored. The other point of view was put by the lady who works as a secretary - that it is unfair to expect that someone can go through their life ignoring all that is good without at some point having to pay the price.

We moved on to Schotroff and her suggestion that active mercy being available to a person depends purely on need and not on desert. "That's a bit difficult to swallow sometimes." "I think there's some kind of heavenly motivation which puts you in touch with some people and not with others." I suggested that there was a distinction being drawn in the ideas of justice between that which concentrates on need and that which gives some role to desert. (In fact the former, needs only, idea of justice would mean that those in greatest need were dealt the greatest degree of justice - another outworking, perhaps, of the theme of God's bias to the poor.) There was a development of this, however, which was that what we need on occasion is to be 'brought low' - which suggests that there may indeed be different kinds of justice for the rich and the poor (or perhaps for the proud and the humble).

The second question took us on to the relationship between

justice and faith with the implication being drawn out by the various quotations that faith is expressed in the doing of justice. (In the sense that justice can be seen alongside liberation as 'answers' to the 'questions' posed earlier in the series, it might be argued here that the doing of justice represents an act of liberating faith - and that the liberation is not only for the recipient of the action but also for its instigator.) The first response in the group was to say that someone who does not accept Christ can still be righteous but that, if they do not accept Christ, they have given themselves a terrible handicap. Also there is, it was said, too much emphasis on the poor - while one should do everything in one's power to help the materially poor, a neighbour is a neighbour no matter what their circumstances. The question asked of Jesus by the rich young man was raised here: what must I do to be saved? The answer: sell all you have and give the money to the poor. The visiting elder replied that he was asked to give up what was nearest his heart - for others that might not be money.

(The originator of the point backed down. Does this little snippet give us a clue as to how churchly biblical interpretation operates? Was the more radical interpretation so much inferior to its alternative that it merited no further support? Or were the social position and superior 'education' of the visiting elder seen as giving his less challenging version more status? In fact

this particular elder is, in many of his attitudes, quite radical himself, but that does not in itself detract from the broader point - was there a class-based dominant ideology at work forcing either adaptation or resistance? If so, then the former option, adaptation, was taken in this instance.)

In consideration of John Robinson's claim that only in the least of his brethren can one accept or reject Christ, we looked at what might be meant by least. Those who are rich, it was thought, might be least in some senses (see, for example, the high suicide rate among children of the very rich). What we do to people, rich or poor, we do to Christ. I returned to the notion which had been discussed earlier, which said that need was at the centre of things and suggested that perhaps those who are the 'least' in this context might be those in need - of food, drink, clothing. It was suggested in return that need was perhaps wider than that although the point, it was made clear, was not meant to indicate any lack of willingness to be involved with the materially poor.

(The response, both here and later in Group B, to question three was so vague and confused that when I came to this study with Group C I omitted this question altogether. What was said tended not to be relevant to the project in hand. The one point at which there were some relevant points made was in relation to Green's claim that 'the

least of my brethren' refers to the disciples - most found this interpretation hard to fathom.)

On the basis that most of us, certainly in this country, are neither oppressed nor oppressing and on the presumption that we are, by and large, people of good will, we went on to ask if it is possible in our world to live justly or to come near to living up to the strictures of the passage from Matthew. In view of the Church and Nation's citation of Amos, the visiting elder felt obliged to confess that he had a town house and a cottage in the country but went on to claim that that in itself did not make him blind to the needs of those around. He claimed, however, that the government were indeed blind to need and to the future (a claim which might have some bearing on the misbegotten question three - that this type of thinking has a bearing on national as well as personal life).

In this light I asked if it were possible, given the conditions of our existence, to live justly. It was reckoned to be impossible to live in today's world and never visit any injustice upon anyone. "It's too imperfect a world." Life was often a choice between evils. The nearest you can come is if you can claim that you do not live on the basis of looking after number one; and if you can treat every situation in which you find yourself personally involved as justly as you can. The group also agreed that the view which says that whatever we do will

have something wrong in it can be pushed too far - to the point of forgetting about the demands of justice altogether. The starting point of justice was then identified as caring - starting with those closest to you and working out. If you cannot feel personally involved with people you will find it impossible to care enough to treat them justly.

The point from Church and Nation about comfortable blindness was accepted as accurate. I asked about how people can have their blindness overcome, have their eyes opened. It was agreed that there will be many who will remain obstinately blind whatever attempts are made to make them see. There was also a plea, however, that the people should not be forgotten who use there social positions, privileged as they are, to work for justice and right.

2) Group B:

The initial response to the question of whether justice is different for the rich and the poor involved the drawing of a distinction between legal justice and "the rewards of life". I suggested that what we were talking about was God's justice and left the group to decide where that might fit in. The next point was that it was very doubtful that Matthew's passage referred to a distinction between rich

and poor - in fact it could be read as "highly encouraging" because it said that whoever was treated with kindness, rich or poor, received that kindness as Christ to the person who offered it. Justice, according to the person in the group most actively involved with issues of justice and peace, cannot be different for the rich and the poor. We therefore moved on to Miranda. "I think that Miranda is talking a load of rubbish." It is quite possible to acquire wealth without violence and spoliation, but by honesty, hard work and thrift - look at the parable of the talents. Then came a distinction between making money (to which Owen refers) and loving money. Another thought was that Miranda may well be wide of the mark but what he says is very popular with many in this country even though we do not have the sharp divide between rich and poor here which Miranda has in Mexico. "It certainly implies that wealth shouldn't be allowed and that those who have it certainly haven't earned it." (It might be noticed here that Miranda is being criticized for his social analysis rather than for his biblical interpretation - but he is actually claiming that it is the bible which limits wealth to being the result of violence and spoliation.)

I asked about the point which is brought out by Rowland and Corner, that of eternal punishment and its presence in this passage. It was found a difficult question with which to deal. I pointed out, by way of emphasis, that all the sins referred to in this passage are those of omission, not

commission. The absence of shades of grey was noticed: "You hope you're not bad enough for hell, but you're sure you're not good enough for heaven." It also does not match well with funeral services which presume a heavenly future for the deceased. There was also comfort in the passage for those who have never heard of Jesus.

When we moved on to the second question, I asked about the fact that the reasoning in the parable of the sheep and the goats is, according to de Dietrich, baffling. Why should we still find it baffling after 2000 years? The group seemed to be in agreement that it is still baffling but, at the same time, thought that an afterlife could not be restricted to believers if for no other reason that so many in this country and throughout the world have never had the chance to believe. Their judgement must surely be based on their treatment of others.

The last of the four quotations in this section was found difficult. The example given was that of contemplative orders. I then asked about the statement by Gutierrez and the implication from Robinson that how one treats the hungry, the naked and so on is not the social dimension of the faith but rather it is the faith itself. The first answer was that this is playing with words - the two cannot be separated ("to know the will of God and to do it"). What, I asked, if you do it without knowing it? The response was then given that to say that faith was the

actions one took was putting things the wrong way round - surely it is one's faith which leads one to take action. "The faith is an inner and entirely personal thing. People are entitled to criticize others for not taking care of people in need, but it does not preclude those others from having any faith ... It may not be much of a faith which does not include works, but one shouldn't confuse the works with the faith." Otherwise, said another, there is no difference between a Christian and a good humanist. Would such a person be a sheep or a goat? "I don't know about the sheep and the goats, but he would not be a Christian."

Again here, as previously in Group A, the discussion of question three was not particularly productive. (Much time was spent on whether or not Adam Smith was relevant - is his talk of order and prosperity in society relevant to talk about salvation? Such a presumed irrelevance is, however, revealing in itself.) The one point which came out of the original question around which the section was formed was that the passage only refers to society inasmuch as it refers to a sufficiently large number of individuals within society. Society, for example, is unable to legislate for the visitation of the sick or the welcoming of the stranger (apart from refugees). Green's view that the passage refers to the disciples was regarded as new and as slightly incomprehensible.

We moved on to the last question. Aldous Huxley's pessimism was regarded as "rubbish" - witness Mother Theresa. Huxley's view was also put down to his secular humanism and thus referred back to the earlier discussion on the relative position of Christians and humanists. The point was taken from the Church and Nation Committee that people can go through life blissfully and deliberately unaware of others' suffering. It was also said, however, that attempts to become involved in working for those less fortunate often result in the would-be philanthropist realising how little he has to offer which is of any consequence. The person making this point reckoned that he could offer more by doing his work well than by becoming a do-gooder. "We can't all go and spend our lives working in the Grassmarket." It was also thought that there are many people, professional do-gooders, who are very admirable but extremely difficult to live with. The importance of love was stressed as the motivation for helping others - not the desire for self-glorification.

All this was then related by one participant to the vows upon joining the church - how does one interpret the promise to give a fitting proportion of time, talents and money. The discussion was on whether this means the church in its narrow sense or whether it means for the wider needs of the world - the latter being favoured. I suggested the distinction between those who see the church as being primarily for its members and those who think of it as

being primarily for those who are not its members. The ability to cast one's caring wider was seen as being worth cultivating. I asked about the role of knowledge - on the grounds that the Church and Nation Committee seemed to be at least partly concerned about ignorance. Does justice depend on a level of knowledge? The answer was 'yes', but a distinction was drawn between knowledge and experience - we can know of things without having experience either of any particular problem or indeed of trying directly to help. (This would be in contrast to those who believe that no-one can understand their particular problem without first-hand experience - often those in poverty or from somewhere like the north of Ireland.) Any attempt, too, to become more personally acquainted with suffering in the sense of 'going among the people' is quite likely to come over as condescension. I asked if there was not an experiential knowledge which was at times a lot more helpful than theoretical knowledge. Another, intermediate, kind of knowledge was suggested which involves hearing from someone who has experiential knowledge - not therefore either directly experiential nor purely theoretical. (This may indeed be the kind of knowledge a network such as the church has might be very good at providing when used properly.) This is part of the role of the system of missionary partners.

The role of prayer had been mentioned in the discussion and this was seized upon as the way in which we all can

contribute, we all have something to offer. It led to a discussion of specifically directed intercessory prayer in communal worship. I asked if there was a danger of prayers which might be described as being for justice and peace being dismissed as political - and the responses ranged from the enthusiastic acceptance of this kind of political prayer to the slightly cautious about the dangers of degeneration to party politics.

When asked to comment on the quotation from Ronald Sider, the response was to fasten on to one phrase from it: "We cannot know." This, it was thought, expressed very well the difficulty there is in knowing what to do with this passage from Matthew.

3) Group C:

Here we started again with a question about the question - can we divide justice in this way, can justice for the poor be distinguished from justice for the rich? The first reaction was that this should not be so but that it tends nevertheless to happen. If this can happen, then, does it happen in the way which Miranda suggests - is he correct to equate the goats with the rich? This brought out a discussion about the control of resources - about how a man would divide up his pay-packet before he got home thus ensuring that the rest of his family never knew how much

was there originally. This was seen as a division into the sheep and the goats, into the rich and the poor. It was a matter of control, of who came first. I suggested that perhaps the poor are neither the sheep nor the goats, but rather the test against whose treatment the sheep and the goats are measured. This produced a reference to Carnegie's dictum: make as much as you can, save as much as you can, give as much as you can. It was quoted, however, in the knowledge that Carnegie's way of making the money in the first place was not perhaps the most ethical way possible.

I asked about David Owen's point and the similarity it bears to Mrs.Thatcher's 'sermon on the mound'. There seemed to be general agreement that, in principle, the making of money need not be wrong, but also a general realisation that so often the making of money becomes an obsession and that this transfers wealth-creation from being a means to being an end. At the other end of the social scale are those who have no chance of amassing wealth - the unemployed. I asked if there was an underclass which had very little justice done to it, and the answer was that there were certainly very different standards applied to how they should be treated. Those who passed judgement on them (either literal or metaphorical) did so from a position of profound ignorance of what it is to want. (Thus we have another affirmation of the importance of experiential knowledge. It is also, however,

an affirmation of the need for justice which takes account of circumstance - and, in that sense, a working out of the biblical evidence that God displays a bias to the poor: the poor cannot look to the secular instruments for a justice which will meet their needs and they must therefore look to God whose justice, by definition, must be at variance to secular justice and is therefore likely to scandalize the rich.)

We moved on to the idea of eternal punishment. One answer was that references such as in this passage to eternal punishment are warnings rather than descriptions - warnings that we can, by our action or inaction, divorce ourselves from the ways of God. With reference, however, to Rowland and Corner's suggestion that the church can tell people to 'go to hell', this participant reckoned that that would be usurping a role preserved only for God. Another, the one 'new' Christian in the group, thought that eternal punishment for tyrants and murderers and torturers had, at one time, been the only way she could make sense of the world, the only way God could still be in control - "the only way I could keep sane when I heard about people who hang kids and things like that." She said, however, that she no longer felt this so strongly. I then asked about the grounds for punishment in the passage, that it was for not helping the victims rather than for making people victims in the first place. This brought to mind for some the refusal of Jesus at one point to distinguish between

degrees of doing wrong. It also brought out the feeling among all in the group that seeing wrong and doing nothing was indeed as great a sin as committing the wrong yourself.

In the second question I asked if any of the quotations came close to how participants themselves saw the link between justice and faith. The man who is an accountant reckoned that the most important point in all the extracts was that by Dietrich which said that those doing the will of God may actually be outside the church. I asked about how important this passage is - one said that it was the most important passage in the bible, while for the most recent convert it was the first time she had come across it. No more was said at this point about the quotations in question two save for the cautious acceptance by some of Robinson's exclusivistic claims about the meeting of Jesus in the poor. Before long, however, the conversation returned to this section.

Question three was passed over save to ask if anyone supported Green's identification of the hungry, thirsty and naked with the disciples of Jesus - no-one thought this made any sense at all. (Such a rejection of Green's viewpoint by everyone in all the groups is actually quite important in that it denies everyone the possibility of opting out of the consequences of the parable by way of a 'churchly' interpretation.)

I started our consideration of question four by asking about the contrast between Huxley's pessimism and Ilunga's optimism. The woman who had recently come to Christianity thought that Ilunga made things sound all too easy: "He says you just have to bring a bit of love into life and you'll go to heaven, but its not that is it? You've got to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." Here it became clear that the discussion on faith and justice had passed her by and the subject returned of the relation between the two. She now maintained the more traditional view that it is belief which counts for most. A middle way was proposed which had had its counterpart in Group B which said that (for those who had never had the opportunity to believe in Jesus) judgement would be on the basis of their treatment of the hungry. Another wondered if life was a little too complicated to be encompassed by any of these formulations. The feeling was that Huxley was off the beam, that it would be nice to think that Ilunga was right, but that the truth must lie outwith either of their options.

The opposition to Huxley's cerebral definition of saintliness brought the discussion around to suggesting that not only do saints not need degrees but neither do ministers (there was no danger of the two categories being confused!). Opinion was also swinging round among the majority to the belief that saints do not need church connections either. All this showed that there was a danger of the church creating barriers between people and

God - rather than making it easier to find him, the church had a tendency to make it more difficult.

The comments on deliberate blindness were easily accepted by all and related to quite close by - to two old ladies who in recent weeks have been shown the housing in the area and have been amazed at the fact that people in areas such as that really have decent homes in which to live. (This is, of course, another facet of the same problem. These ladies presumed there to be a squalor which in fact does not exist in the kind of way they thought it did. It was not a case of the presumption of a lack of poverty but of more poverty - a situation which they had presumed to be just a part of the way things are, unfortunate but unchallengable. This example does show a definable difference in perception between Group C and, say, Group B: whereas in Group B there was a real concern that people there might not realise the poverty which exists, in Group C there was a concern that people from elsewhere might think that everyone who lived there, lived in squalor - thus denying them credit for the way they lived their lives, not doing them justice.)

The toughness of the parable was recognized by all although there was none of the fear and trembling of which Sider speaks. The ability to see Christ in the hungry and the homeless, especially as they are quite likely not to be easy to like, was considered to be a genuine difficulty

with which all Christians would struggle.

DISCUSSION

The parable of the sheep and the goats does indeed tie in any notion or idea of justice with Christ as he is met in the victims of our world. What much of the theology of liberation seeks to argue is that, because of this, it is the victims who understand best what it is which makes up the good news, what leads to salvation. In that sense the judgement which is visited upon the sheep and the goats does not concern them. Neither, however, is it directly concerned with those who have victimised them - the parable does not go into the reasons for or the causes of their victimisation. What it does concern itself with is the undeniable truth that we are all, in some way or another, involved when people become hungry, thirsty, homeless, naked, ill or imprisoned. The first question to be considered here, therefore, is how people interpreted that involvement. What are the kinds of relationship which are necessary before justice can be done?

Almost everybody in every group recognized that the ability to see Christ in the victims was far from easy to develop. In Group B there was a worry that attempts to seek out such victims would be regarded as condescension. In Group A there was resistance to the idea that Christ is met in any

group more specifically defined than that of the neighbour. In Group C it was thought that the building of relationship depended a great deal on knowledge and understanding which had experience at their base - thus seeking to build a just relationship with the poor could not be done on a purely theoretical knowledge, a point specifically contradicted in Group B. In Group B, however, the point was made that the motivation for going to the help of those in distress must be that of love - and it is questionable if love can be based on knowledge as opposed to experience. In Group A there was a discussion about the possibility of seeing need as the sole criterion for aid and succour - a much more disinterested idea than that of love and one which could, presumably, operate on the basis of knowledge rather than experience. It might be argued, however, that it is only possible to regard reaction to need alone as just if the relationship is one based on love and thus on personal experience.

The tendency to think that one can operate on the basis of theoretical rather than experiential knowledge is a tendency more common in those with higher levels of formal education, and thus a trait of the middle class. Traditionally, too, the response to suffering on the basis of need alone (rather than on some estimate of desert) has been something treated with great suspicion by that same class. It ought to have been expected, therefore, that those in Group B would favour a formalised method of

victim-relief which took account of the reason for the victimisation (ie. is this person a genuine victim?). The expectation of Group C would be that they would think of needs without worrying too much about the reason for the need, and that they would put much more emphasis on experiential understanding. As has been seen, some of these expectations were indeed fulfilled. As before, however, reality had a tendency to throw up unexpected complications and inconsistencies.

Group B seemed to want a combination of loving commitment and impersonal knowledge (hard to achieve), while Group C believed that experience was an essential component of knowledge, but believed also that such an experience would include knowledge of the reasons for poverty and suffering. Group A also looked more deeply at the idea of justice as response to need but found it more problematic than did Group C. Group A however, because of the slightly different way in which the group approached the problem, was the only group to give any thought to what those who are not victims might need - and thus to what might be just for them. The thought that many 'need' to be brought down a peg or two was not repeated elsewhere, but it does provide a way in to a differential justice for the rich and the poor - which is complemented by the compensatory model offered in Group C.

Attitudes to the justice of the accumulation of wealth were

much more straightforward and much more predictable. Group C tried not to say that making money was wrong but did have some reservations about the methods which might be deemed permissable in its making. Group B seemed to have far fewer worries about the way in which money was accumulated - those who did it being presumed to be basically honest until proved otherwise. In Group A the contribution from the visiting elder, who probably has the greatest experience of any participant in the field of investment and so on, tended to presume that big business was dishonest until proved otherwise. Those in Group B thought in general that it was possible to make money without being seduced into loving it for its own sake. Those in Group C were much more dubious and in Group A greed was thought to be hard to separate from the attempt to make money. The question, of course, is: whose experience is the more reliable - those who have money and feel they have not been seduced by it, or those who do not have it but know the effects produced by its accumulation in other hands? And again, how can you feed the hungry and clothe the naked if you have no spare money or food or clothes? Group C had an answer to this as well - it was their opinion that those with least are those who give most to help others.

The discussion around the idea of eternal damnation had at least two aspects to it: the first was whether or not people thought that such a concept had a place in Christian theology; the second was the grounds on which it might be

thought that such a judgement could conceivably be made. There was little support anywhere for any thought of eternal damnation. In a sense this should come as a great surprise since so much Christian preaching over the centuries has put this at its very heart. It might be said that here more than anywhere else the liberal European mind finds difficulty with what at least some liberation theology has to say. It was generally thought that it was at this point that the greatest difficulty arose, therefore, in trying to understand the passage as a whole. For one or two there was the temptation to see rewards and punishments in this way as a setting to right, an explanation of wrongs in this life via compensation in the next. Even then, however, the strictness of the judgement in this parable gave everyone pause for thought - and the man in Group A who said that we all had entries in both columns surely had a point. Only for the one person in all the groups who is a recent convert did the implication of salvation for non-believers present a problem, although all (for the reasons set out already) had less ease with the idea of damnation for believers. The most telling comment on this subject came from the man in Group A who related it to his own school days when a judgement was made on ability very early on - and those deemed to be lacking were "put in a corner and forgotten about." Here was somebody who could relate to the biblical imagery because of what he had suffered. It may well be that only if one has been sentenced to that kind of hopelessness, can one relate

properly to what is being said in Matthew. Is this, therefore, evidence of the epistemological privilege of the poor in spirit whose only hope is in the name of the Lord?

Finally, there is the basic connection to be made between justice and faith. Do we find Jesus and, because of that, help the poor and the hungry; or, do we help the poor and the hungry and thus find Jesus? Or is this a false dichotomy? Might it be, rather, that those who believe in Jesus are called to see him in the poor and the hungry; while those who do not believe will nevertheless find his favour by helping the poor and hungry? In this project it should have been expected that those who come from a middle-class background would find most difficulty in connecting faith to justice in the way, for example, which Gutierrez sets out. And certainly there was in Group B a distinct unease with that whole idea, most clearly put in the contribution quoted above. The other side of the coin, however, would be that those in Group C would find little problem accepting such a position. As was said, the one who found this difficult was the recent convert, but others there seemed to have none of her doubts. In an attempt to overcome the apparent disagreement within the group on this point, the accountant (the one member who could be described as middle-class) came up with the same kind of compromise which had appeared in Group B - that such a matching of justice and faith was provided for those who had never had the chance to accept or reject Christ.

(This, of course, ignores Robinson's point that the only place Christ can be accepted or rejected is in dealings with the least of his brethren.) The same middle-class tendency to look for compromise and the best of all possible worlds was found in Group A - when the visiting elder proposed that 'the least' being referred to meant anyone who might turn to me for help, whether they were in the kind of extremis described by Matthew or not.

Study Six - Luke 1:46-55

"My soul tells out the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit has rejoiced in God my saviour;
for he has looked with favour on his servant,
lowly as she is.
From this day forward
all generations will count me blessed,
for the Mighty God has done great things for me.
His name is holy,
his mercy sure from generation to generation
toward those who fear him.
He has shown the might of his arm,
he has routed the proud and all their schemes;
he has brought monarchs down from their thrones,
and raised on high the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the help of Israel his servant,
as he promised to our forefathers;
he has not forgotten to show mercy
to Abraham and his children's children forever."

1. What does the Magnificat tell us about the worship of God?

"I asked what they thought Herod would have said if he had known that a woman of the people had sung that God had pulled down the mighty and raised up the humble, filled the hungry with good things and left the rich with nothing.

Natalia laughed and said: "He'd say she was crazy."

Rosita: "That she was a communist." ...

And what would they say in Nicaragua if they heard what we're saying here in Solentiname?

Several voices: "That we're communists.""
(Cardenal, 1977, pp.30/31)

"It may be more important to understand, in the Magnificat, what is meant by 'the hungry shall have their fill and the rich be sent empty away' - as characteristic of God's dealing among men - than to search out yet another psalm tone in which to sing it. Praising and glorifying God are never self-authenticating. They take their significance and value from the fundamental orientations of life as a whole." (Cullinan, 1987, p.37)

"Only by becoming a child can one enter the kingdom of heaven. The same spiritual childhood is required for entering the world of the poor - those for whom the God of the kingdom has a preferential love ... This spiritual childhood has in Mary, the mother of the Lord, a permanent model. Daughter of a people that put all its trust in God, archetype of those who want to follow the path to the Father, she points out the way. The Magnificat, which Luke places on her lips, gives profound expression to what the practice of Latin American Christians is bringing to light once again in our day. The canticle of Mary combines a trusting self-surrender to God with a will to commitment and close association with God's favourites: the lowly, the hungry." (Gutierrez, 1984, p.127)

"The Magnificat expresses well this spirituality of liberation. A song of thanksgiving for the gifts of the Lord, it expresses humbly the joy of being loved by him ... This thanksgiving and joy are closely linked to the action of God who liberates the oppressed and humbles the powerful ... The future of history belongs to the poor and exploited. True liberation will be the work of the oppressed themselves; in them, the Lord saves history."
(Gutierrez, 1974, pp.207/8)

"This church, the church of the poor, is no longer a prop for the interests of the powerful. With Hannah and Mary it sings that the Lord is to put down the mighty from their thrones and exalt those of low degree, filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich empty away ... It is to this church, then, that we invite you ... This church is the Church of Christ, to whom we all desire to be faithful. The experience of our brothers and sisters is that the poor find in that church the presence of him who was called Emmanuel: God with us." (Julio de Santa Ana: in Winter, 1980, p.15)

2. What is the relationship between worship and life?

The integration of sacred and secular, of liturgy and life came home to me cruelly one day when I had been asked to celebrate Mass for a group on Family Fast Day. Between being asked and the actual time of the Mass I came to realize that nothing else in the group's life was facing up to being brothers and sisters of people dying of hunger, and that we were about to use the Eucharist as a substitute for, not a sacrament of, the gift of ourselves. I found the question crucifying, but in the end someone else had to take my place." (Cullinan, 1987, pp.104/5)

"Where Christians see fellow human beings suffering grave injustice, they have a primary duty to pray for them. Intercessory prayer will be sincere when it is accompanied at least by social and political agitation aimed to correcting the injustice." (Wainwright, 1980, p.429)

"When Christians defied the absolute authority of the state by worshipping another 'king', they were a disruptive political threat. The early believers were imprisoned and killed because they worshipped God as Lord and Christ as King and because their lives testified to their worship.

Perhaps there are so few Christians in jail in America because we have forgotten how to worship." (Wallis, 1984, p.54f.)

"To worship God now means to offer oneself, with one's words, acts and whole life, for God's glory and purpose. Thus Paul exhorts the Christians in Rome: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship," ... Such sacrificial worship presupposes and leads to a continuous metamorphosis, a turning away from conformity to the patterns of this age and a transformation of our mind, a renewal of our power of discernment. In this sense everyday Christian life is worship, a participation in Christ's way of high priestly service by becoming a victim for others." (Weber, H-R., 1989, p.110)

3. What is the relationship between worship and the poor?

It has always been said, and with good reason, that the Church calls people together through word and sacraments. Usually, however, such convocations are 'regional', that is, they involve different social castes ... You rarely find the 'rich' celebrating a liturgy and spontaneously inviting the poor. The converse does, however, occur ... The root cause of the difference in ability to bring people together is that among the poor word and sacraments have power to evoke the source of the faith and challenge people to a true mission. The same is not true of the liturgies of the rich." (Sobrino, 1984, p.104)

"'When we come together to break bread,' said a seventeenth-century writer, 'we must break it to the hungry, to God himself in his poor members.' The sharing of bread, concluded sacramentally, has to be continued socially - and thence economically and politically. And

the economic consequences of the Eucharist - of sharing bread - are potentially very dangerous in a country like yours or mine that enjoys a standard of living which is that of Dives to most of the rest of the world." (Robinson, 1960, p.68)

"The revelation of the maternal face of God in Mary makes her especially present in the spirituality of the poor and the oppressed. It is among them that her feminine mercy is revealed and embraced in all its significance. In spirituality, Mary is the mother, sister, companion, and the hope of the poor ... Mary has been adopted by the people as a sign of Christian hope and liberation. The poor and suffering sense, in her, the loving solidarity of the God of the poor and the justice that raises up the lowly and casts the mighty from their thrones." (Galilea, 1988, p.75f.)

4. Is what we call 'worship' valid?

"I have always found it difficult to celebrate the eucharist, or Holy Communion, or whatever we call it. How can we sit in beautiful big buildings, eating and drinking from silver plates and chalices, 'in remembrance of' Jesus, who presumably never owned a house or silver utensils? That was the question I used to ask my Sunday school teacher. I could never figure out exactly what it was Jesus had died for, if this was the way we commemorated him. Wouldn't it be better to feed the hungry and heal the sick as he had done?" (Marianne Katoppo: in CCA Youth, 1984, p.70)

"It is true that the prophets sometimes spoke disparagingly of religious feasts, but that was only when they had lost their spiritual content and had degenerated into an empty and worldly ritual. For the man whose heart was set on

God, there was no greater joy than coming to worship him, especially in the presence of his people." (Watson, 1978, p.196)

"It is Jesus who teaches us what being a priest means and what access to God through cultic worship means. Jesus' work of mediation takes place in the profane realm of real history, therby terminating the validity of the Old Testament priesthood and its cultic worship. Jesus was a layman. He belonged to the tribe of Judah, not to the priestly tribe of Levi. His work was carried out among the people, not in the precincts of the temple. Instead of offering libations and holocausts, he approached the oppressed and offered them hope while condemning their oppressors." (Sobrino, 1978, p.303f.)

"The dilemma between justice and cultus occurs because while there is injustice among a people worship and prayer do not have Yahweh as their object even though we have the formal and sincere 'intention' of addressing ourselves to the true God. To know Yahweh is to do justice and compassion and right to the needy." (Miranda, 1977, p.57)

"The Christian community cannot worship in an authentic way unless it has first effectively put into practice the precept of love for fellow man ... Only by revolution, by changing the concrete conditions of our country, can we enable men to practice love for each other ... I have asked his Eminence the Cardinal to free me from my obligations as a member of the clergy so that I may serve the people on the temporal level. I forfeit one of the privileges I deeply love - the right to officiate as a priest at the external rites of the church. But I do so to create the conditions that will make these rites more authentic." (Torres, 1973, p.334f.)

5. What are the dangers in all this?

"I have attended specially prepared 'justice' or 'aid' liturgies ... engendering (but not dealing with) guilt, degenerating into propaganda or newscasting services, indulging in 'heavy' teaching as though the glory of God depended upon his people gaining A level passes in international politics. Some ministers are so anxious to make explicit their commitments to the poor, that the liturgy begins to sound like an ideological closed shop." (Elliott, 1987, p.126)

"Two men (they might have been women) went into a church to pray, one a radical and the other a conservative. And the radical looked straight at the altar, thinking, 'I thank you God that I am not like that conservative over there: colour television, a new car, credit cards, children at a public school. I subscribe to the New Internationalist, I'm on the Justice and Peace Commission, I fast for CAFOD every Friday, I march against the National Front, I have an old black-and-white TV, I bake my own bread, and I read Hans Kung.' And the other man could hardly bear to look at the altar and he hung his head and prayed, 'Lord I am in a mess. Be merciful to me, a sinner." (Jim Forrest: quoted and slightly adapted in Cullinan, 1987, p.15)

The studies have sought to follow themes regarded as important within liberation theology. Thus they started with poverty and moved through suffering and oppression to the putative answers to these of liberation and judgement. The last is a study which perhaps betrays a greater first-world emphasis - worship. The importance of worship is heavily disputed within liberation theology, especially in

Latin America, and some of the quotations in the study show marked antipathy to it. It seemed important, however, to find out how much people in this country could match the concerns of the previous studies with the church activity with which they are, no doubt, most familiar. To use worship as the place where all else can be gathered together is also useful because it can give an indication on how to take forward the thinking thus far in the studies. It represents a link to a possible future project which can move on from belief and bible-reading to worship - and thus examine how these various levels of Christian life interact with one another. The biblical focus for this study was Luke 1.46-55 (the Magnificat).

1) Group A:

I asked first if the position being suggested for the Magnificat, as an exemplar of Christian worship, was justified. The first point, from the visiting elder, was that he had the feeling that what most people regard as worship is not at all how we are supposed to worship. Real worship would be in following Christ's commandments. He went on (and now with support from the former bus-driver) to say that the Magnificat should not be taken at its face value. If the wealthy were to leave the church, there would be no church. It is the kind of language which is found in various places in the bible which superficially

says one thing, but at a deeper level has another meaning: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Thus those who would accuse Cardenal's group of being communists (for using the language of the Magnificat) would do so because they did not understand what was being said. They also thought that many in the church did not try to understand the words and were, as Cullinan implies, more concerned with the tune to which they are sung. (This despite a recognition that the choice of music does in some way have an effect on worship.) I went on to ask, in the light of previous comments, about the two quotations from Gutierrez and the one from Julio de Santa Ana - do they take the words of the Magnificat too much at their face value? The answer, though somewhat hedged about, was that they do indeed take too literal a sense from the passage.

In the second question, Wainwright's was the quotation with which identification proved the most straightforward. I suggested that there was a contrast between him and Weber (similar in fact to the alternative ways of seeing the fourth servant song in study two) where one saw Christians as taking injustice and suffering upon themselves, while the other saw their task as seeking to remove it from existence. This, however, did not produce comment beyond a tacit agreement. We looked at Cullinan's withdrawal from the celebration of communion and the response was that the attitudes he found so difficult are actually among us all the time. To one the action taken by Cullinan was not a

problem because he set no great store by the sacraments - every meal could be eaten in remembrance of Christ. Communion services, like prayer in Wainwright's point, can be used as a way of opting out rather than of opting in.

Wallis, it was felt, was ignoring the fact that we are living in a post-Christian era and that therefore it is quite difficult to do things which will be regarded as threatening to the state. I pointed out that Wallis and his group had several times been arrested for various activities such as holding prayer meetings alongside railway tracks when nuclear weapons are being moved - not, it was felt, something Jesus would have done. (The sanctuary movement was felt, however, to be different.) There was some doubt about whether or not Jesus did things which took him into deliberate conflict with the authorities of his day. (It took us on to a debate about Jesus' divine foreknowledge.)

When asked to comment on the quotations in question three, the first response concerned Sobrino's reference to "regional convocations" - if you cannot love your neighbour who is the one you bump shoulders with, how can you love others? (It may be worth noting that the definition of a neighbour being offered here is not that given in the story of the Good Samaritan.) I asked if Sobrino's allegation of segregated worship was true in Edinburgh. The former bus-driver reckoned that historically and geographically

Edinburgh was divided in this way; and the visiting elder made reference to birds of a feather. They felt, however, that Sobrino went a step too far in saying that the gathering of the poor had a greater unifying power than had the gathering of the rich. The divisions into social caste which were under discussion were not felt to be a problem - indeed there were some positive advantages to them.

I asked about Robinson's interpretation of the Eucharist as a model for life in general. It was felt to be a reasonable ideal but not to be how most people regarded a communion service. Jesus, it was said, never visualised an equal sharing of the world's resources - which is why he made reference to the poor being always with us. (It is interesting to note that many people in this series of studies have insisted that references to the uplifting of the poor and so on have been references to the poor in spirit and not to the materially poor. More than once, however, reference has been made to this statement of the poor being always with us - never with any question but that in this case the reference is indeed to the materially poor.)

In the fourth question we looked first at Katoppo's comments. The visiting elder reckoned that big churches and silver chalices were themselves part of the worship of God, a doing of honour. The former bus-driver, however, related the story of Burdiehouse church which used to use

a room in the school for worship - which was full. When, however, a purpose-built church was provided, attendance fell away. The building is certainly not necessary and may in some circumstances be a hindrance rather than a help. The visiting elder still maintained that Katoppo could not possibly have understood what is written in the New Testament.

Miranda was felt to be quite wrong - witness Eastern Europe where oppression meant a greater need for worship, injustice necessitated cultus. I pointed out that Watson was actually taking issue directly with what Miranda is saying. Watson refers to joy in relation to worship - here there was a feeling that the better word was gratitude. (I mentioned that this was near to eucharistia.) The general sense of what Watson had to say was, however, taken to be nearer the mark than was Miranda or indeed any of the others - although the visiting elder was not convinced about "religious feasts".

We finished with the chance for participants to voice criticisms of the general drift of all the studies - Elliott on blinkered vision and Cullinan/Forrest on self-righteousness. One view was that if one is trying to argue a case there is every chance that occasionally that case will be overstated - which is probably applicable to various of the writers whose comments we have studied. There was no attempt here to latch on to the opportunity to

dish out widespread criticism!

2) Group C:

The first question was again whether the Magnificat can be taken as a model for worship. The singing of it in worship, it was thought, raised the spirits and lifted the heart, but much depended upon where it was being sung. This was true, however, of many parts of the bible - people will hear what they want to hear - and it does not make the Magnificat particularly noteworthy. This passage was, like others, likely to be heard and understood by some but not by others. It did enjoy the same kind of privileged position in the affections of most present, however, as did the 23rd psalm. I asked if the passage had the same meaning here as it seemed to have in Nicaragua - where it was given overtones of communist subversion. The answer was that here it did not have the same politicized meaning. It was not operating in the same situation of poor people attending such an opulent church with things like gold-plated sanctuaries. (This was actually not the first time a traditional Scottish presbyterian dislike of over-ornate church buildings had surfaced, either here or elsewhere, and such a regular repetition helps bring to mind the similarities between the liberation theology of today in Latin America and the Reformation theology of sixteenth-century Europe.) The affection with which the Magnificat

is viewed by Nicaraguan poor was thought not to be replicable in Scotland because there are not enough of the poor who want to have anything to do with the church. They are more likely to be communists than Christians.

Taking the discussion further, I asked if Christian worship could be seen as a beacon of hope for the poor here in the same way as the Magnificat can be there. The answer was that it is possible - one participant had seen that happen in a Baptist church. This, for one person put the passage in a better light because it began to think of the "good things" as being spiritual rather than material. I asked if he thought the hunger in the passage was spiritual or material. The answer seemed to be that the hunger was physical while the reward was spiritual. This theme of physical oppression being answered by spiritual reward continued with reference to Gutierrez' point about the oppressed being the locus of God's saving work. This did not provide the difficulty I had expected. It was related to the difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom of heaven, although the idea of the kingdom being in history rather than beyond time was a difficult concept to grasp. The role of the oppressed in history did, however, receive further attention. One thought was that the oppressed keep trying to save history but are constantly thwarted; while another was that they have been making history to a very great extent in the past year. The seeming advances of somewhere like East Germany were questioned, then, by one

opinion which said that the workers there will soon be oppressed by the large West German companies - they will simply move from one oppression to another.

In question two I began by asking if the group thought that Wallis was going a bit far. The immediate response was that no he was not. Everything we do as Christians has become diluted. Cullinan also received support for his 'stand' on a matter of principle rather than taking the usual church position of making life as easy as possible for people. The church, it was thought, does not challenge people nearly enough - but if people are challenged they more often than not rise to that challenge. Wainwright's connection between prayer and action was thought to be just this kind of challenge - although it was recognized as being a hard challenge to meet. It was a challenge, said the woman who was a recent convert, which could only be met by the conviction that one was being led by the Holy Spirit into doing God's will. It was a challenge, said another, to hear and understand those who were not necessarily of the same mind as ourselves, a challenge to hear beyond the confines of what we want to hear. I asked if people wanted to hear different things in different places - and the answer was that that may be so but that it is possible to make people want to hear.

Question three brought us to Sobrino's contention that rich and poor do not mix in worship. It was thought to be a

reasonable and an accurate point. Participants here were very aware of the social division of the churches where middle-class people living in a predominantly working-class parish will go to church elsewhere. The dedication of some elders who go in the opposite direction in order to serve the church was also recognized, but it was reckoned that travel in that direction was the exception rather than the rule. The result of such division was that most church members had no conception of being part of a wider church. It was thought also that it would be easier for rich people to visit a poor church than for a poor person to visit a rich church. Such a position was undesirable but does exist.

Robinson's desire to see the significance of the eucharist extended beyond the walls of the church was found difficult - at least in the terms in which he speaks. Galilea, here as elsewhere, was also found difficult - principally because of the tendency to drift into Mariology.

In question four there was a small degree of understanding for Torres' position inasmuch as true worship involves us in the secular as well as the sacred world. Little support, however, was forthcoming for taking up an armed struggle. It was a question of where one draws the line, how far do you go? Leaving families behind, as Jesus seems to suggest at one time, was regarded as particularly hard. I mentioned the example of the women at Greenham Common not

long ago who were criticized for leaving their families to be there - and the reply was that men would not have been subject to the same criticism. There are circumstances where extreme situations demand extreme responses.
Katoppo's criticisms were not regarded as being universally applicable. There are many places where communion is celebrated in a much more simple fashion than she seems to be envisaging. The place of worship, too, was emphasized by Jesus reaction to his anointing at Bethany - the poor you will have with you always, this is a beautiful thing she has done. I asked, in relation to Sobrino's contribution, if people thought there was still a role for a specialized clergy. The pastoral and teaching/preaching roles of the minister were emphasized but no attempt was made to defend the specifically cultic role which Sobrino attacks. (This may reflect the fairly schizophrenic attitude of the Church of Scotland to the sacramental role of the minister - where the celebration of the sacraments are reserved to those specifically ordained for reasons of good order rather than on any theological grounds. It also leaves open, however, the role of the minister in relation to public prayer and the thought that there is a liberation to be accomplished of the church from the 'clergy'.) Watson was closer to the opinions of those present than any of the others in this section.

We finished with the two 'warnings' from Elliott and Forrest. Again here there was a reluctance to put too much

emphasis on these implied criticisms - although everyone reckoned to have encountered in their area something not too far away from what Elliott describes. Such an encounter, however, was regarded with a smile and with no feeling of resentment or agitation.

3) Group B:

Here we started with the question of how valid it is for the Magnificat to be used as an archetype for Christian worship. The immediate reaction was to question whether Mary actually said these words - and for the participant making the point, this was vital in making a judgement on its significance. (There was produced by this for this person a worry about the reliability of other ascribed quotations in the Gospels - particularly those ascribed to Jesus himself.) The Magnificat was not for any present a text with which they were familiar or for which they felt particular affection - it was not regarded as central to a Christian understanding of worship.

I asked if the comparison between the Magnificat and communism was in the mind of the people in Nicaragua quoted by Cardenal or, on the other hand, if people who use this in worship regularly (and do not see the comparison) are missing the point. There was recognized a certain

schizophrenia which takes the bible as central for belief but at the same time manages to take certain passages such as this without really thinking about what they might mean. Another response was that talk of monarchs being tumbled from their thrones had completely different connotations two thousand years ago from the meaning it might have now in the age of democracy. From this the point emerged that one set of the mighty being cast down does not mean at all that what rises in their place will necessarily be any better. However, power does tend to corrupt and there comes a time for any mighty person to be cast down - long periods of rule by one person or group are generally not good because they stop listening. (This sparked a brief exchange on whether or not this general rule now applied in the particular case of Mrs.Thatcher!)

In an attempt to combine the first quotation from Gutierrez and that from Cullinan, I asked if the significance worship was to take from the orientation of one's life was in fact commitment to the lowly and the hungry. The answer was that what should be brought into worship was praise and openness to the will of God - and an awareness of his will was what should be taken out. Gutierrez was challenged on his ascription of favouritism to the lowly and the hungry: "does God actually have favourites?" (This was related to a discussion elsewhere on God's favouritism or otherwise for those who are baptised. There was a temptation here to go into thoughts around the baptism of the cross - but I

resisted it.) Worship, it was thought by another, was empty if there was not service attached to it. Worship was related by all to the vertical and horizontal aspects of the cross - following the sermon in that church the previous day.

In question two there was an immediate relation by one in the group to what Wainwright had to say. I asked if it were more common for people to link prayer and action in the way he suggests or for them to keep the two separate. Another suggested that intercessory prayer could still be sincere even if it were to stand on its own. Not everyone need be involved in social and political agitation although the social action might simply be to write a cheque to enable someone else to continue their work. "It is a great comfort to know as you grow older that, even though you can't do the active things, you can still pray."

I asked about the action Cullinan describes of withdrawing from celebrating communion. One asked what his alternative was. Another answered that he could have gone through with it and explained to the people where he thought they were falling short. The first thought they might well have walked out. There was some consideration of fasts in general and whether their point was self-discipline (it was not) or was it to give what was saved to the poor (it was). No mention was made of solidarity with the poor but soon afterwards another (perhaps the most conservative in the

group) pointed out how such an exercise can at least begin to give one an understanding of what it means to be hungry (a reference back, perhaps, to the discussion of different kinds of knowledge in the last study). Getting back more specifically to Cullinan's quotation, it was pointed out that the group to which he refers is by no means unique but rather is replicated every week up and down the land. This person went on to refer it to herself and ask herself if her annual gift to Christian Aid was not a token gesture to keep her conscience at bay. Others too wondered if they really took seriously the plight of those with little or nothing as they shared with most in this country the sin of being overfed.

We moved on. I asked what they made of what Wallis had to say. There was a question of what the point of going to jail was - unless it was to work with those inside. An example of someone who has been known to do just that was Helen Steven. Nevertheless, another said, there is no need for those who are worshipping to be at loggerheads with the state. There was much more agreement with Weber's statement that, "everyday Christian life is worship." That said however, there was a caveat recorded that we could be heading for a very one-dimensional view of worship which concentrated on service to the exclusion of praise.

The group was asked if any of the quotations in question three rang any bells - or alarm bells. What Sobrino had to say about regional convocations was granted to be true in

his country but was not reckoned to be relevant here. One of the great strengths of the Church of Scotland was its ability to gather people of all social classes together - the group's church, for example, containing a range of people from the very poor to the quite rich. (This is in marked contrast to the view expressed on this same subject in Group C.) Another pointed out, however, that in poor areas of Scotland the church was struggling to survive. She wondered if this was because of an over-intellectual approach on the part of the church but another thought that the poor were just as capable of being intellectual. Various explanations were attempted as to why the poor were being lost and I asked if it was thought that this was a recent phenomenon - it was thought that it was. A third was still struggling with the idea that poor churches were less well attended (a point she had contested in the very first of the studies with reference to Wickham's observations on the church history of Sheffield). She wondered if this was a problem of ministers (especially those with families) being unwilling to work in such areas. Another suggested that the minimum stipend should be paid to those working in areas like their own while more should go to those working in places like Easterhouse - because they have to work under far more pressure. The group's area however, it was maintained, has its pressures too.

There was a brief debate on whether the creation of beautiful wealthy places of worship in poor areas actually

helped that worship, or whether it was just a burden on the poor from which they needed to be liberated. I suggested that it was out of just this kind of situation that liberation theology had been born. This took us on to question four.

The dichotomy between worship and injustice seemed to the group to be overdrawn at best and, more likely, completely false. I pointed out that Watson tried to set aside this dichotomy in opposition to Miranda. Miranda's point was compared to the Highland tradition of communion being reserved for those who are considered worthy. He seemed to be denying the gift of grace. We returned here to the one-sidedness of the analysis of worship which seemed to be ignoring praise and confession and petition - the lack of confession in the analysis seeming to be particularly unfortunate as therein might lie an answer to much of the anti-cultic polemic. Katoppo was in turn compared to Judas Iscariot - who provoked Jesus' statement of the poor being always with us. Another said that there was always a feeling that one should give the best to God and that there was a danger of utilitarianism creeping in. (The liberationist response would presumably be that in that case you should give the best to the poor.)

The importance of appropriate symbolism in communion was discussed with reference to the type of cups and bread - ie. pottery or silver, whole pieces of bread or little

squares, individual cups or common cup, alcohol or alcohol-free.

We looked at the merits and demerits of a full-time ministry with a sole right to celebrate the sacraments. The merits, however, seemed again here to be related to the teaching function of the ministry. Little could be found to justify the restriction of the celebration of communion.

The dangers described in question five were reckoned to be real dangers. They were not a danger in the group's church, however, but rather the danger lay in not going far enough down that road - or so thought one.

DISCUSSION

Every group supported David Watson in his positive and affirmative view of worship. The points to be made here, therefore, are made in the context of this overall approval. Such a broad agreement, however, includes within it some interesting differences and some insightful comments.

The relationship of the Magnificat to politics produced marked differences of approach which it would have been hard to predict. In Group A, references to what appear to

be political realities were thought to be not for literal interpretation. In Group C, the references identified by the people in Solentiname as sounding communist were thought to have no political import although the hungry who are to benefit from God's action were thought to be those suffering from physical hunger. In Group B, however, the political import of these verses was reckoned to be real. Discussion went on, though, to relativize this by saying that, exactly because the passage refers to a political reality, we have to examine what that political reality was at the time the passage originated. (This was the first time the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation had surfaced to any great extent.) What this meant in this context was that it was possible to say that the passage referred to tyrants and potentates but could not be taken to refer to a society which had democracy as its political system. (This is actually a very subtle way of disarming the passage - and probably more effective than a simple denial of its relevance.)

The Magnificat's relevance to the worship of the church was far from being universally acknowledged. In both Group C and Group B it was mentioned alongside the twenty-third psalm - though in Group C it was to put the two on the same level while in Group B it was to subordinate the Magnificat to the psalm. It was interesting to note that in Group B there was concern that comments related to the Magnificat pushed consideration of worship away from praise and

towards service - and yet the Magnificat itself is praise, but perhaps praise for things regarded as inappropriate. In Group A the question of the centrality of this passage to a consideration of worship produced a discussion on worship rather than on the passage. It is to be expected, of course, that in a church such as the Church of Scotland, with its lack of emphasis on liturgical use of the bible, the attempt to link particular texts with worship will be new and different. What was interesting, however, was that only in Group C did this particular passage seem to strike any note of recognition - with its use in various contexts, including funerals, being discussed.

Quotations which pointed towards tokenism received universal support and clearly struck home on a personal level with some - particularly those in Group B. This either means that they were more in need of such self-examination or, just as likely, that there was a small demonstration here of the phenomenon described by Forrest and adapted by Cullinan at the end of the study. It is, however, important to take Elliott's caveat that it is pointless to generate guilt if you have no way of dealing with it.

It was in the relationship between worship and justice that this study tied in most with the rest of the project. How did participants relate the consideration of poverty and the rest to the current consideration of worship? Having

said already that Watson found a wide measure of agreement for his positive view of worship, it is clear that there was going to be little or no enthusiasm for any view such as that proposed by Miranda which argued for a abandonment of worship until justice reigns. What was interesting, however, was the range of points which flowed from this general position. From Group A came the argument which said that in times of persecution and injustice the need for communal worship is more rather than less. The example given to support this was that of Eastern Europe in recent time, but the case of the early church in time of persecution must be just as powerful. From Group B, and from a person with her roots in the Highlands, came the point that Miranda's position is remarkably close to that of much Highland theology which restricts the Lord's Supper to the 'worthy' - a denial of the free gift which is being offered.

Group C's discussion of this was also interesting because, not for the first time, they managed to produce quite a different slant on the debate. Firstly, there was there some degree of understanding of the position adopted by Camilo Torres. Although not endorsing in any way his decision to adopt the armed sruggle, there was nevertheless the thought that if conditions are extreme enough then extreme responses can be contemplated. This led to a discussion around the limits to personal discipleship which went far beyond similar discussions in the other two

churches. In Group C too there was a discussion about how we might interpret the idea that in the struggle of the oppressed to bring about justice there might be concealed the struggle of God to save history. Although such a discussion was very preliminary and came to no firm conclusions, the very fact that the people there were willing to involve themselves in that kind of debate showed a distinctive view of the world and of the faith not apparent elsewhere.

All three groups, however, mentioned the story of the anointing of Jesus, the objections from Judas Iscariot, and the answer from Jesus that:

> "The poor you have always among you,
> but you will not always have me."

The lesson taken from this by all was that Jesus was saying that giving to him was the most important thing. Of course he was indeed saying that, but this interpretation fails to go on to his reasons. He was saying that the days of his flesh were numbered and so the opportunity to give to him in this way were limited and not to be scorned. He says, in effect, that after he is gone there will be plenty of time to give to the poor because they will not have gone away. In view of other biblical texts, not least the parable of the sheep and the goats which formed study five, it is surely perverse to claim that, now that he is not among us in his flesh, the way to give to him is to give to the church rather than to the poor. Yet it is just this

interpretation which has permeated the life of the church to such an extent that it was presented in almost identical language by all three groups - groups which on other matters have been capable of being quite distinct in their answers. What are the implications of this for theories of a dominant ideology in the church which is favourable to the ruling class?

Finally we come to the thoughts of the groups on worship and social division. Here there were three distinct understandings represented by the three groups. In Group B there was the belief that, although in poorer areas church-going was lower (which was news to one member), every congregation in the Church of Scotland contained a broad social mix which co-existed harmoniously. In Group A there was a recognition that, in Sobrino's words, convocations tended to be regional. This, however, was regarded as positive since people of like background feel more comfortable together. In Group C there was a ready recognition that social divisions were alive and well in the church, particularly in cities. This was regarded here as reprehensible because it locked people into a narrow and blinkered view of the church which denied the possibility of wider vision. In Group C people also thought that it was easier for a rich person to visit a poor church than vice versa - thus providing Sobrino with another piece of support which was lacking elsewhere.

Added to this Group C also thought that people hear what they want to hear - and agreed that what is wanted is different in different places. Is there, therefore, a message acceptable to one section of society which is not acceptable to another? And if so, what are the dangers which face the church if it accommodates its message to these different expectations? Group C believed, however, that these barriers could be overcome, that people could be made to want to hear certain things - and thus enabled to hear them. It is surely central to the mission of the church that the appropriate ways are found to do that. And it is the mission of the church which will be the subject of the concluding chapter (eleven) of this thesis.

CHAPTER NINE: THE USE OF THE BIBLE.

In this chapter we can reflect upon the discussions of the groups in the research project. The first form that reflection will take will be that of a consideration of biblical interpretation. Through this we will hope to place the discussions of the participants in a context - that, particularly, of the liberationist background to this thesis. The aim of such a procedure is to show where such a background can help in the analysis of the thinking of church groups in Scotland today and to begin the process of discovering the influences which create that thinking. Part of any such analysis must involve the identification of themes. The previous six chapters have themselves, of course, been built around themes (poverty, suffering, oppression, liberation, justice, worship), but here we must look not so much for substantive themes so much as for hermeneutical themes - what, in other words, are the ways in which the bible is being interpreted? What is being done when we juxtapose the bible with the substantive themes of the studies?

1. The background to liberation theology exegesis

Much of the previous chapter concerned the attempt on the part of those participating to come to terms with liberationist exegesis. The emphasis on the

epistemological privilege of the poor, the biblical bias to the poor, the primacy of action over belief and other elements all gave pause for thought at one stage or another. This chapter intends to go over some of the biblical passages again but this time in parallel to other studies from the Third World. Before that stage can be reached in section three of the chapter, there are two preliminary stages to be covered: the first of these is to examine the antecedents to liberationist exegesis, to suggest that much of what is often viewed as being original has its background in European theology and biblical interpretation and even in European philosophy. Such an exploration, however brief, is important for two reasons: the first is that the strangeness which many feel when first in contact with an exegesis which seems foreign can begin to be overcome; the second is that we can start to get past the tendency to argue that liberationist exegesis can only be comprehended by those with first-hand experience of the Third World and its way of life. In other words both these reasons aim to suggest that the cultural specificity which many claim in relation to this way of working is not actually that specific when put under examination. Thus our study will begin to seek the ground upon which we can build a liberationist exegesis for the so-called First World. Our examination of the type of themes mentioned above will involve reference to Bultmann, Barth, Gadamer, Habermas, Ricoeur and, even more briefly, von Rad.

> "Since the exegete exists historically and must hear the word of Scripture as spoken in his special historical situation, he will always understand the old word anew." (Mueller-Vollmer, 1986, p.247)

These words from Bultmann begin to point us to what is the foundation of liberationist exegesis - the existence within particular history and human arrangements and the renewal of old traditions. These emphases are, of course, to be found also in Barth and von Rad. Rowland and Corner (1990) argue that the early church did not feel itself bound by a word-by-word interpretation of scripture but operated a 'creative fidelity' whereby the inherited word was made forever new and could forever elicit response. This constant renewal of old traditions is, according to von Rad, a sign of life in the tradition and in the faith. Thus such an approach moves us into another Bultmannian emphasis - the purpose of scripture to awaken faith. The faith, however, which is awakened is a contextualised faith - one which sees the context of the exegete's reading of the bible and one which is, on that account, interested in the context of the writing of the bible.

The result of this is that the reader of scripture is challenged because it becomes possible for scripture to be brought to bear on the life in the present which the reader is leading:

> "The renewal of old traditions in the light of new situations ... has nothing to do with a desire to manipulate the text. It has to do with a willingness on the part of the interpreter to allow himself or herself to be manipulated by the text, to allow the Sitz in Leben of the reader to be criticized and judged by the word of God. It is a form of exegesis

> that is willing to make the reader vulnerable to the scriptural content, to make room for what Karl Barth called 'an act of the content itself'." (Rowland and Corner, 1990, p.69)

Barth (1956) talks in the Church Dogmatics I,(ii) about the specificity of the biblical message to person, time, place and language (Barth, 1956, p.464). He also, however, insists that the search for historical truth, which is of necessity temporal and specific, must be abandoned in favour of a search for scriptural truth, which is eternal and universal (Barth, 1956, p.494). Barth is insisting here that scriptural truth cannot be limited to any particular historical expression. Rather must that same truth be received anew in every new historical circumstance. Holy Scripture, he says, speaks now and we cannot therefore look to its speech in days gone by. The Word of God is an event which is an act of God, an event in which we, "allow the prophets and apostles to say again here and now to us what they said there and then." (Barth, 1956, p.533) Truth, according to Barth therefore, is received in history, not produced by history. Rowland and Corner move from this kind of statement to argue that both Barth and Bultmann bequeath to liberation exegesis the interest in the ability of the bible to address the current context, an ability denied by the historical-critical method:

> "The historical-critical method allows my reading of the text to be a judgement on the past but in no way a judgement upon me ... It is a method which expresses the human understanding trying to control and master the text rather than to be controlled by it - or by the Word speaking through it." (Rowland and Corner, 1990, p.68)

Werner G. Jeanrond puts it this way:

> "Barth's concern is not limited to a detailed historical and exegetical study of words, sentences or concepts. Rather he aims at bringing to light the subject matter of the text. Therefore he demands that the historical-critical exegetes should be more critical in order to be able to see what the subject matter of the text really is and demands from us. According to Barth the historical-critical exegetes are too modest in their hermeneutical efforts ... Barth's hermeneutics begin where Bultmann's hermeneutics might eventually lead to, namely with the recognition of God's revelation in history."
> (in Biggar, 1988a, p.85f.)

We might begin to sum up Barth's contribution to this field by saying that we do not seek to master a text but rather we let the text master us, that we allow ourselves to be taken over, in our own lives, by the scriptures. The hermeneutical theme to be found here, therefore, is that of 'scriptural enaction'.

Bultmann, of course, was openly and self-confessedly influenced by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. His insistence that existence is always in the world and that understanding is intimately linked to that existence was what was behind Bultmann's thoughts on pre-understanding. Thus understanding is always historical, dependent on the historical existence of which we are a part and on the availability of language within such a context. In a sense, however, Barth's position is not that far from this same point. Although he argues about Bultmann's ideas on preunderstanding, it would appear that his criticism was that Bultmann saw the New Testament witness as but one outworking of a more general and universal

preunderstanding:

> "What the Bible calls God's revelation, according to my understanding of its witness, is not to be explained as merely one determination of human existence. And the explanation of revelation as a determination of human existence is inevitably truncated and twisted when it is forced into the framework of that 'preunderstanding', where it can have significance only of a Christian instance of the general human encounter with some Other."
> (Jaspert, 1982, p.142)

The debate, in other words, is about chronology and priority - which comes first, theology or philosophy? However, if we concentrate on the thinking behind all this, which is that we exist in history as the inheritors of certain predetermined understandings which arise from our position within history, then we find that Barth and Bultmann are not that far apart. Bultmann sees the biblical revelation as being one expression among others of such an existence while Barth sees it as being <u>the</u> expression of human existence. The important point, we shall see in the next section, is that the witness of the scripture is to be set free in each and every generation, each and every context. Truth is contextual and therefore, though Barth at least might have had some difficulty with the thought, differential. This theme of differential truth will arise again later in this chapter and elsewhere. It is, in essence, an expression of the enactment of scripture referred to above - truth, like faith, being something which exists in action or not at all. We will find that liberationist exegesis develops this into praxis.

This idea of differential truth is taken up also in a

debate between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jurgen Habermas. Gadamer is the clear successor to Heidegger and, if anything, only serves to reinforce the Platonic emphasis of Heideggerian philosophy. Whereas Heidegger, in Being and Time, says, "Any interpretation which is to contribute understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted," (Mueller-Vollmer, 1986, p.225), Gadamer, in Truth and Method, writes, "the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being." (Gadamer, 1989, p.276f.) While, however, the Platonic theory of recollection posits a reality with which Heidegger would presumably equate Being, Gadamer's prejudice finds its legitimation not in the timeless existence of all knowledge but in the authority of tradition. And it is this role assigned with favour by Gadamer to tradition which Habermas seeks to challenge. Gadamer sums up the position which Habermas finds objectionable when he says:

> "We started by saying that a hermeneutical situation is determined by the prejudices that we bring with us. They constitute, then, the horizon of a particular present, for they represent that beyond which it is impossible to see." (Mueller-Vollmer, 1986, p.272)

And also:

> "acknowledging authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true." (Gadamer, 1989, p.280)

These ideas of prejudices beyond which it is impossible to see and authority which can, in principle, be discovered to be telling the truth are what lead Habermas to his ideas on the hermeneutics of suspicion.

Essentially Habermas is wary of the positive evaluation given to tradition by Gadamer. Such an evaluation gives to tradition all the weight of 'common sense' and Habermas wants to challenge the notion that this is, of necessity, conducive to revelation of the truth. He writes:

> "We have good reaon to suspect that the background consensus of established traditions and language games can be a consciousness forged of compulsion, a result of pseudocommunication, not only in the pathologically isolated case of disturbed familial systems, but in entire social systems as well." (Mueller-Vollmer, 1986, p.317)

We thus have two themes which might be said to be in competition with one another: these are tradition and suspicion. And we can now begin to note, therefore, that from each side of this debate there is a strand to be discerned leading to liberationist exegesis. We can note that from the side of Gadamer comes the theme of tradition - the argument that time and history represent not so much a barrier as a link. This theme, with its support from Bultmann and von Rad, provides the strand which leads to Clodovis Boff. It is the line of the renewal of old traditions. On the other side of the debate is the theme of ideological suspicion which runs to Segundo. This is perhaps the more radical line, the one less concerned with maintaining good relations with the official organs of the church. It is the line which begins to equate common sense with force and with ideological domination:

> "force achieves permanence through precisely the objective illusion of freedom from force which characterizes a pseudocommunicative agreement. I call a force which is legitimated in that way, as Max Weber does, authority." (Habermas in Mueller-Vollmer, 1986, p.316)

We can, in this, begin to find two distinct inheritances for liberationist exegesis from European scholarship, two reactions to one situation. This divergence will become even more important in the next chapter. Before, however, in this chapter we move on to what various liberationist writers do with such an inheritance of themes, we have one more European to consider with his provision of hermeneutical themes: Paul Ricoeur.

Ricoeur starts from basically the same point as the other writers discussed here. In 1967 he wrote, "the Cogito is within being, and not vice versa." (in Ihde, 1971, p.91) Our understanding, therefore, is dependent on our historical existence. We cannot convert ourselves into a tabula rasa and we are forced to accept that there is no such thing as presuppositionless philosophy. For Ricoeur, the basic presupposition is that of intersubjectivity. We exist with others and relate to others - the question is, of course, how. Ricoeur approaches this via the ideas of appropriation and comprehension. "As appropriation," he says, "interpretation becomes an event." (Ricoeur, 1976, p.92) Such an event is an event of comprehension. In other words, we are not required to become another person or even to become part of the inner life of that other, rather are we enabled to see as the other sees, understand as the other understands. In this sense Ricoeur's theme of appropriation approximates to Gadamer's fusion of horizons. There is, however, another theme which is important in even

the shortest look at Paul Ricoeur - and that is omnitemporality. It is this which enables a text to transcend time and continue to speak, what takes the text out of the hands of the original addressees - even out of the hands of the original writer. It is because of omnitemporality that texts must of necessity be granted a surplus of meaning beyond the meaning originally imputed.

Appropriation is an event but not the mere repetition of an old event, rather the creation of a new one. It is therefore an event of creation not only for the text but also for the reader. Interpretation which follows what Ricoeur calls "the arrow of the sense" initiates a new self-understanding. In this way all parties involved in the event become new and this depends critically on a surplus of meaning which will open up the contemporary world and its possibilities for the reader. As we will see in the next section, Ricoeur's ideas too have their part to play in the exegetical pattern of liberation theology, this time with particular reference to Carlos Mesters and Juan Luis Segundo.

We have therefore identified the following themes which have originated within the European context but which, we will see, have become very important for the development of Latin American theology: (1) scriptural enaction, (2) contextual truth, (3) renewal of old traditions, (4)

suspicion, (5) appropriation. It is the contention of this chapter that these themes, having modified in Latin America, can be reintroduced with those modifications once more into the European context. The concept by which they have been modified and, in some cases, united is that of (6) praxis - the doing of the truth.

2. Liberation theology exegesis - principles.

The first writer to consider with regard to liberationist exegesis must be Clodovis Boff. His Theology and Praxis, (1978) is easily the most comprehensive attempt to delineate just what is involved in such an enterprise. In this volume, Boff develops what is the central distinction in his hermeneutics (which is in turn one branch of his 'theology of the political', the other being social analysis): this distinction is between the correspondence of terms and the correspondence of relationships.

The first of these, correspondence of terms, is the more simplistic and the less satisfactory alternative. It suggests that any community which suffers or is oppressed can translate the various characters in a biblical story into its own terms and find there a parallel which of itself throws light onto their own situation. There is a tendency to this in the community in Solentiname from which Ernesto Cardenal reports (1977). Boff's criticism of this

approach, however, is that it presumes that history simply repeats itself. It also tends to be quite uncritical when it comes to the reliability of texts, using all parts of scripture in seemingly the same way with no questions about historical reliability or any examination of the process by which texts came to be written.

When we turn to the correspondence of relationships we find the emphasis has changed. This approach recognizes that our access to Jesus is through the scriptures and seeks, therefore, to put the scriptures themselves in their proper context. Such an approach takes redaction criticism seriously. And it is here that we can see Boff following those two disciples of Heidegger - Bultmann and Gadamer:

> "The point of the correspondence of relationships approach is not only to describe the intentions of the biblical writers themselves, but to relate that intention to the way in which the scriptural texts have been understood in the tradition of the church." (in Rowland and Corner, 1990, p.60)

Here we are concerned with the creative fidelity of which mention was made earlier. Boff, however, speaks of creative fidelity in a much less individualistic way than does Bultmann: the correspondence of relationships theory, he says, "ascribes a more important place to the living memory and creative fidelity of the interpreting community." This life and creation to be found within the community includes, indeed begins from, that community's praxis.

It is praxis which determines interpretation on three

levels: the interpretation must begin where the interpreters are, what their social involvement already is; there must be a historical relevance to the theme proposed for study; there must be an end in sight, a goal of understanding which prompts the study and the praxis in the first place. Boff, indeed, does not so much argue that this is how interpretation ought to take place so much as he argues that this is how interpretation already does take place, whether that state of affairs is recognized or not. Because of this, in a society riven by division it is not possible to have a universal theology which all sections of that society will recognize as valid - those who are involved in interpretation must choose where their loyalties lie, from which starting point to undertake their interpretation. This is virtually the exact position of Gramsci, who was mentioned in the first chapter and to whom we will return in chapters ten and eleven, when he talks about organic intellectuals. What we can say here, however, is that the thrust of Boff's argument (and that of Gramsci) is that the cultural specificity of hermeneutical ability applies with equal force to groups within society (classes) as it does to whole societies. Because of this, it is not enough simply to accept an approach of correspondence of terms because the allocation of roles which is central to the method is itself dependent upon ones position in a society - how one sees oneself and others will depend on where one is. Thus we see that Boff's distinction between correspondence of terms and

correspondence of relationships is a distinction between a theory which takes social analysis seriously and one which does not because one takes seriously the development of ideas and pays attention to whose ideas are being developed, while the other does not. And we saw in the studies that the degree to which the different groups took social analysis seriously varied quite markedly.

Thus although Boff can be seen to follow Bultmann in his use of the idea of creative fidelity, we can recognize that the context of the need for that creativity is somewhat different. Bultmann saw the need to reinterpret the message of the gospel for a world whose cosmology had entirely changed. Boff sees the need to interpret in a world where society has entirely changed and indeed where there are different societies living, so to speak, under the same roof. It is a need which some in the church would still dispute. It is, however, in his affirmation that what the correspondence of relationships achieves is the reaffirmation of the importance of tradition that we could begin to run into a little difficulty - the same difficulty as Habermas has with Gadamer, that tradition can and often is a cover for the use of force. Here we encounter that other important strand in the thought of Gramsci - hegemony (on which chapter ten has more to say). The question, however, can be turned around by the assertion that what is being achieved in this way is not necessarily the reaffirmation of the tradition unreconstructed, but the

rediscovery of parts of the tradition which have been submerged by hegemony, by ideological domination. The themes of tradition and suspicion are still in some form of conflict here but Boff's commitment to social analysis should save him from some of the criticisms Habermas had of Gadamer.

The second writer to whom we can turn in this section is Carlos Mesters. We can find a summary of his approach in this area in a Dei Verbum bulletin: the article is entitled, "Characteristics of the Christian Reading of the Bible." He writes, "The situation of the people must always be before our eyes when we read the Bible." (World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate, 2/89, p.7) By this he means both the people for whom the text was originally written and the people of today. This reading is to be done communally because it is the life of the community which is the first concern of biblical interpretation. This in turn is because the aim is not first and foremost to interpret the bible but rather to interpret life with the help of the bible. Such interpretation will be judged by its outcome: if it results in motivation to work for liberation, it can be judged to be a reliable reading:

> "The objective of the Bible is one and only: to help people discover that God has come in order to listen to the cry of the poor, and to accompany them on their way." (Worlds Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate, 2/89, p.8)

Such a summary serves to show that Mesters is, of all the

writers we are considering here, the nearest to the official position of the Roman Catholic church. He sees the old as contained in the new, the new as poten-tially available in the old, and he uses the traditional see-judge-act methodology which the church as a whole accepts having taken its cue from the French Jocists. Whenever, he says, the three elements of community, bible and reality are intermingled, the result will be the correct one. The bible seasons the lump of life and even where it is not directly discussed its effect can still be seen. Mesters, however, is much more sanguine than is Boff concerning the people's interpretation of the bible and, indeed, seems to be quite happy with the corresondence of terms approach which Boff criticizes:

> "often the Bible is what starts them developing a more critical awareness of reality. They say, for example: 'We are Abraham! We are in Egypt! We are in bondage! We are David!'"

This is just what the folk in Solentiname did and Boff felt it was quite inadequate. Mesters does, however, strike the same note as does Boff when he says:

> "People may lack a critical sense in reading and interpreting the biblical text. They may be tempted to take the ancient text and apply it mechanically to today, without paying any serious attention to the difference in historical context."

It is a problem which, in the end, Mesters effectively dismisses by saying that such a problem shows the need for scientific exegesis but that:

> "the exegete is like the person who had studied salt and knew all its chemical properties but didn't know how to cook with it. The common people don't know the properties of salt well, but they do know how to season a meal."

Mesters' basic theme of biblical interpretation is that of appropriation - a theme developed, as we have seen, by Ricoeur. This theme allows a way in to the hermeneutical circle described here by Joao B. Libiano in Putting Theology to Work, edited by Derek Winter:

> "The method is always the mutual encounter between the word of God and the hope of the community and people; life leads to an understanding of the Word and the Word to the understanding of life - a genuinely people's exegesis is created, with its own guidelines and legitimacy; according to Father Mesters, it is very close to the 'spiritual' style of the Holy Fathers." (Winter, 1980, p.41)

The key to the ability to accomplish such a task is appropriation because it is through this that the people can rest a knowledge, previously guarded jealously by an elite, from the grasp of that elite and set it to work in their service. In the task of setting the bible in the context of life and therefore putting the bible in the service of life, putting life first and the bible second, it is important to be clear about whose life. It is the life of the common people (in Mesters' terminology) which is set into this hermeneutical circle and therefore the bible and its message must be appropriated as well by the common people because otherwise the two elements which go to construct the circle would never meet. The theme of appropriation is the theme of challenge to dominant ideology, a theme of claim and the theme which allows the possibility of uniting the competing themes of tradition and suspicion. Appropriation, informed by suspicion, is what can renew old traditions and allow the enactment of scripture in new contexts.

It is when we come to Juan Luis Segundo, however, that the implications of reappropriation seem to me to be fully taken on board. Segundo is the writer who most wholeheartedly develops a hermeneutic of suspicion and who most typifies within liberation theology the kind of thinking developed by Habermas in opposition to Gadamer. The argument between the two positions is well summarised in this passage from Literary Theory (1983) by Terry Eagleton:

> "Hermeneutics sees history as a living dialogue between past, present and future, and seeks patiently to remove obstacles to this endless mutual communication. But it cannot tolerate the idea of a failure of communication which is not merely ephemeral, which cannot be righted merely by more sensitive textual interpretation, but which is somehow systematic: which is, so to speak, built into the communication structures of whole societies. It cannot, in other words, come to terms with the problem of ideology - with the fact that the unending 'dialogue' of human history is as often as not a monologue by the powerful to the powerless." (Eagleton, 1983, p.73)

It is this suspicion which Segundo seeks to bring to bear in the field of theology and biblical interpretation. He takes on board the fact that only with a hermeneutic of suspicion can the renewal of traditions be tackled and appropriated. He argues that everything to do with ideas cannot but be tied in with the social structure which forms the context of its existence. This is true not only of theological thought but also of religious forms. The answer to this is, in Marcuse's phrase, the great refusal - the refusal to accept the rules of a game where fairness and truth do not exist, or at least where there is more truth hidden than revealed. Segundo thus takes from Marx

(and also from Hegel) the importance of negation, what Comblin described as the affirmation of what is not.

In his hermeneutical theory, Segundo therefore lays down two preconditions: the first is that questions can be found within the circumstances of the present which are:

> "rich enough, general enough, and basic enough to force us to change our customary conceptions of life, death, knowledge, society, politics, and the world in general." (Segundo, 1977, p.8)

Such a change is essential, he maintains, in order to bring our questions up to the level of theology and in order to enable us to bring theology down to earth. The second precondition is that it is accepted that such questions will not be able to be answered within the traditional forms of biblical interpretation. This is Segundo's adoption of the negation of all that is - any question which can be answered within traditional forms is not a question of which much can be expected. Without these two preconditions being met, theology remains as a conservative force, unable to liberate. Segundo then goes on to propound his version of the hermeneutic circle which has four factors in its composition:

1) a way of experiencing reality which leads to ideological suspicion;
2) the application of that suspicion to the ideological superstructure (including theology);
3) a new way of experiencing theological reality which leads to exegetical suspicion;
4) a new hermeneutic with new elements of

understanding at our disposal.

Of course, if this methodology is circular the fourth element must lead back to the first. The test, on this understanding, of liberation theology as a whole will be whether or not the new hermeneutic mentioned in number four does indeed lead to a new way of experiencing reality. Put differently this is asking if liberation theology liberates. Does it, in other words, provide a new praxis, a new awareness of the world and the influences at work within it? Such a circle means new questions and therefore new answers - the old questions and the old answers are negated. They are negated in order that we should be able to read the signs of the current times - including the power structures within them (we will return to the issue of power in the following chapter).

The word which can be said to be central to this enterprise therefore, is "kairos". Attentiveness to the signs of the times means an emphasis on human criteria, on how people lead their lives and on what questions such ways of life pose. This is what grounds the faith in a particular history and enables (and presumes) the re-appropriation of which other writers speak. The implication of such an approach is, however, the highlighting of differences and divisions - the refusal to:

> "pass over in silence such matters as color, social class, political ideology, the national situation, and the place of the country in the international market." (Segundo, 1977, p.42)

If that is not refused then human values become

subordinated to theological criteria:

> "the Church must pay a high price for unity. It must say that the issues of suffering, violence, injustice, famine, and death are less critical and decisive than religious formulas and rites." (Segundo, 1977, p.42)

The choice of theology then, says Segundo, is not made on theological grounds. Jesus' use of scripture can be compared, he says, with that of the Pharisees in order to make the point plain - Jesus puts human beings and their needs first whereas the Pharisees place the cold words on a page ahead of human need. There is no liberation apart from historical particularity. In this, it seems to me, Segundo is the writer who manages best to combine the themes discussed in the first section of the chapter. He combines them by being unafraid of embracing local theology - unafraid of putting particular human experience and need ahead of universal theological principles. It is this lack of fear in its hermeneutical life which the church anywhere in the world will need before its mission can hope to be taken seriously by the oppressed. It is the approach to hermeneutics which most clearly articulates the epistemological privilege of the poor.

3. Liberation theology exegesis - examples.

A. Jesus' Teaching at Nazareth.

In the book Voices from the Margin, examples are provided of the way in which those voices express themselves. One

of these concerns the passage in Luke's gospel which formed the first of the studies undertaken in the research project. On p.423f. we find an account of a discussion from Cape Town, South Africa which encompasses Luke 4:14-30, a slightly longer passage than the one studied in the project but one which nevertheless provides an interesting comparison. From the starting point of an exercise in imagination (the participants are asked to imagine they are making a film about the incident) the conversation draws out some noteworthy points.

The first focus of the conversation is on the congregation rather than on Jesus. (Human criteria, as seen with Segundo above, come first.) It is, they think, like any religious congregation - interested in a quiet life and a stable and unchanging environment. Being disturbed by the new and the strange and the different was not what they wanted from a religious gathering. Then the conversation switches to Jesus and to his claim that the deliverance mentioned by Isaiah was being fulfilled. Was liberation accomplished, they ask, and were the people not disappointed by such claims? What, it is being suggested, was set free was the truth - the truth about the need for liberation and change among people who were smug, self-satisfied and complacent about the status quo. This, they go on to suggest, is the reason for his rejection. In anticipation of the next chapter, we might say that this interpretation sets the truth in contradistinction to

common sense.

The conversation is turned to the situation which the participants face daily - the situation of those church congregations who are quite happy with the way things are while the oppressed look for someone who will lead them out of their oppression. Where is Jesus in this situation? Jesus is the one who tells the truth, especially to the oppressors. They go on to say, however, that it is very dangerous for any one person to imagine that they have that role to play. No individual should take on Jesus' role and become an individual truth-teller. The need is for a community of mutual truth-telling. The implication gradually drawn from all this, however, is that the telling of truth is divisive - even sharing is a problem for those who do not want to share. Nevertheless, the group feels it has made some progress in its understanding of the passage: "So, have we any clearer idea of what good news to the poor means in our situation? It means that they will have the chance to share and be accepted as full human beings." (Sugirtharajah, 1991, p.429) The group then goes on, however, to expand upon this idea of sharing. Sharing is an active rather than just a passive project, one which reaches out to others: "We must actively persuade people by our example and by our challenging of their values." (p.429) "We need both emphases, on the internal change and on the external confrontation with structures." (p.430)

In all of this discussion from South Africa, of course, there is a lack of any mention of differential truth. Jesus was setting the truth free, they maintained, to challenge and disturb and to change. What was missing was the thought that truth might be seen differently depending on one's background or even class, although the idea was certainly there that the truth might divide people into categories such as these. In our discussion in the study groups we spent time on discussing who the poor might be, how the category might be delineated. In South Africa, however, there was never any doubt about who the poor might be - the question was much more to do with an attempt to delineate freedom and liberation. Of course the two concerns are not unrelated because upon one's definition of the poor will depend one's understanding of what might be for them good news. Nevertheless there seems to have been a certainty in the account given in the book concerning the identity of the poor which gave an impetus to the discussion. Why was this lacking in Edinburgh?

Perhaps a way in to this question can be found by posing another: what is it that makes us see good news to the poor as being confrontational and divisive - or makes us fail to see the matter thus? The group in Cape Town certainly seemed to latch on with alacrity to the fact that Jesus' intervention was far from welcome and interpreted that to mean that religious people anywhere are going to react negatively to such a challenge. We might then ask if

the desire in Scotland, or parts of it, to interpret the poor in terms of the poor in spirit (see below) was not, in fact, part of the same phenomenon. The divisive nature of Jesus' message of the kingdom was, in fact, looked at a bit more in the project when the groups came to study four where comments from Alves and from Moltmann brought out the idea of liberation as confrontation. This became part for the groups of a wider discussion concerned with a series of words which I listed earlier as: political, material, physical, and social - and this as a counterbalance to Pixley's list of individualized, spiritualized and ahistorical by which he characterized the development in the early church from dynamic new movement to static institution. The list of words is, however, a list which sets alarm bells ringing in many church members in Scotland; it is a list which, when applied to the bible and the reign of God, brings accusations of bias and unwarranted politicization. The role of experience must surely be central here: particular, historical, contextualized experience.

The group in South Africa is introduced in this way:

> "Here are the reflections of a group from Claremont, Cape Town. It consists of Blacks, Coloureds and Whites ... Most of them were involved in some form of social action. Squatters and black unrest were the hermeneutical backdrop for their reflections." (p.423)

Why should the author include this information? What is the significance of the jobs or interests of the people? Why bother to mention what was going on in the area at the

time? The answer is that experience is important - it is important for us to understand the social environment in which the bible is being discussed or we will not understand the discussion. Pixley's charge, of course, is that the church has moved away from exactly this way of looking at hermeneutics and begun to see the bible and the faith and indeed itself in ways quite detached from the world in which we exist.

If, however, we begin to take the context of interpretation seriously then we begin to notice the immediacy of the liberation offered by Jesus in this passage and we find ourselves compelled to make sense of what he claims. The South African group did this by way of an understanding which saw truth as the object of Jesus' liberating action - after which action the world could never be the same again. This is so because the whole area of the enterprise becomes physical. It becomes impossible to confine its significance to realms and intentions which are spiritual or ethereal. Once this step has been made, liberation becomes the issue rather than that of defining the poor. The South African group had a joint experience which was different from at least two of the groups in our study: its experience of struggling against injustice and poverty and oppression led it to see the assurances of Jesus in terms which were applicable to that struggle - for them, if good news for the poor were to mean anything, it must mean something in their situation. The group in Edinburgh

nearest to this was Group C, the group in which the greatest knowledge of poverty and injustice was to be found.

This is best demonstrated by comparing the different groups in relation to two studies, numbers one and three. The two studies concentrated on poverty and oppression respectively. The interesting comparison is on the role allotted by each group on each occasion to power. In the first study, the one which matches in its biblical starting point with the study from South Africa, powerlessness was offered as a possible answer to the question: "what causes poverty?" This answer was ignored in Group A, considered in Group B, and seized upon in Group C. When we turn to the third study, we discover that power is readily accepted everywhere as the background to oppression. Its presentation in the material provided, however, meant that power was set up alongside wealth as alternative or even competing explanations for the existence of oppression. This meant that the reactions were provided with a link to the first study and the question of poverty. In Group A there was an unwillingness to oppose the two in quite this way and the term offered to accommodate both was 'self-interest'. In Group B there was a definite option for power over wealth. In Group C participants wanted to say that in this country wealth was the most significant factor in the oppression of people. The important point about all of this is that only Group C were consistent; only the

people there made the link between power, wealth and oppression both when coming at it from the 'poverty end' and also from the 'oppression end'.

This puts them more into line with the people in South Africa than either of the other two groups. This analysis also enables us to move towards an answer to the question posed above as to why good news to the poor becomes seen as divisive in some places and not in others. The answer concerns the analysis of the causes of poverty. Unless poverty is related to oppression and the poor seen as oppressed the conflictual nature of this good news will be missed. The role of experience in building up such an understanding is therefore central. This is the matter of differential truth, the enactment of scripture, the praxis to which I alluded earlier. It is a matter central to this work and one to which I will return in later chapters, and indeed later in this chapter.

B. The Suffering Servant of God.

In 1492-1992: The Voice of the Victims, edited by Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, (1990) Jon Sobrino has a piece entitled, "The Crucified Peoples: Yahweh's Suffering Servant Today". In this he picks up from Ignacio Ellacuria in his use of the phrase, 'crucified peoples'. By this both Ellacuria and Sobrino intend a deliberate equation of

Christ on the cross and the suffering masses of Latin America. Both, says Sobrino, suffer slow death and institutionalized violence; both suffer innocently; both arouse revulsion and are thus despised and rejected, counted among sinners; both receive graves with the impious; most of the crucified peoples share also the silence of the suffering servant. The answer to such suffering, it is argued, is not to try out explanations of why people are crucified but rather is it to bring them down from the cross.

This piece thus treads the same ground as the second study in the research project. There people were asked about this very dichotomy between understanding suffering and abolishing suffering, between taking on the sins of the world and taking away the sins of the world. We saw that in all three groups there was some acceptance of the idea that suffering should not be endured alone - that is to say that there was support for the thought that the Christian response to suffering should be along the lines of taking <u>on</u> the sins of the world. When, however, that choice was put more directly the general agreement began to break down. Group B thought that even to suggest that Christianity could take away the sins of the world was to put the reliability of the faith at risk - it would leave people too easily open to disappointment and disillusionment. Group C saw much more readily the need to have an ultimate hope that the sins of the world would be

taken away - an echo perhaps of Comblin's utopia, the challenge to what is by the assertion of what is not. Group B was much more realistic, much more in tune with the general mood of the churches (in Britain at least) in that the more eschatalogical emphases of the faith tend to be played down - a continuation of the battle with the enthusiasts which has raged since the Reformation.

The next question might therefore be this: is the suggestion that Christianity is about taking away the sins of the world one which would lose the church all credibility? Sobrino would suggest, presumably, that the opposite is in fact true - that if Christianity is <u>not</u> about taking the people down from the cross then it deserves no credibility:

> "we must bring the crucified peoples down from the cross. This is the requirement of an anthropodicy by which human beings can be justified." (Boff and Elizondo, 1990, p.125)

The members of the study groups were not asked to get their minds or indeed their tongues around anthropodicy but their reactions to other parts of the matter under discussion might give clues to their acceptance or otherwise of such a term.

This is therefore the ideal point at which to wonder a little more about the dilemma put to the groups, and indeed to all of us, by the tale told by Max Peberdy. In the last chapter I said that participants were divided not so much between themselves as within themselves and also said that

this was the point of commitment by which liberation theology thought we should all be judged. I have hinted before about the distinction which will become important between, on the one hand, matters of abstract principle and, on the other, specific situational examples where a challenge can be made to an otherwise impenetrable ideology. This will be developed more in the next chapter. Here, however, was surely a chance for those involved to see in a specific example the chance to put their commitment to justice in the forefront. They did not and we have to ask why.

One clue might be found in the fact that although the story was set out in quite a specific way it was taken by those discussing it to have a general significance - and indeed they were right to presume this. The result, however, was that discussion lost the immediacy, which I suspect was sought by Peberdy, and became much more abstract. Examples of similar situations were brought in both Group B and Group C but there was something lacking. That something, I am sure, was experience. The story concerned other people in another place and the links could not be made with anything sufficiently close to the experience of the participants in the study groups. This therefore bears upon another issue which has already arisen - that of the relative merits and significance of experience and knowledge. Perhaps also, however, sufficient links could not be made between Peberdy's story and the suffering

servant in Isaiah. It might be the case that the link was not made which Sobrino and Ellacuria wish us to make between the suffering servant and the crucified peoples. Is it not the case that liberation theology does indeed see suffering in entirely different terms from first world theology, the emphasis in the latter being on binding up wounds while the emphasis in the former is on removing the causes of injury? And if this is so, then can we go on from there to say that what lies at the heart of this disagreement is, in fact, cost?

It is cheaper, after all, to bind up wounds. Binding up wounds leaves the way things are intact. The fabric of society is left to sustain and to uphold as it always has. The difference when it comes to the perspective of liberation theology is, however, that there cost is seen from quite a different angle. There the cost is seen from those who pay the price - the crucified peoples. They pay the price which those from the north refuse to pay - the price of justice. This is the price which Sobrino, picking up from Ellacuria, puts in this way:

> "the Third World offered light on what historical utopia must be today. Utopia in the world today can only be a 'civilization of poverty', all sharing austerely in the earth's resources so that they stretch to everybody. And this 'sharing' achieves what the First World does not offer: fellowship and, with it, meaning to life." (Boff and Elizondo, 1990, p.126)

Might we be looking here at theological interpretation which sustains injustice? Might we be becoming stuck in the First World in such an individualistic way of thinking

that we stress the reaction to our own suffering more than we stress our reaction to the suffering of others?

This emphasis on the importance of one's reaction to suffering was one which was shared by all the groups but perhaps it was put most pointedly by the man who said that individual suffering was in some way related to individual sin. It may be that we can begin to make some progress here by addressing this question. In the context in which the comment was originally made the reference was clearly to the visitation of suffering upon the one who has sinned. In Isaiah's poems of the servant, however, it is clear that this is not what is meant. There it is the sins of others which are being borne by the one who is suffering - and this is also what is meant by Ellacuria and Sobrino when they talk of the crucified peoples. Their analysis of the situation is that those in the Third World who suffer poverty and hunger and homelessness and oppression are in fact being punished, being made to suffer for the sins of unseen others - those in the First World who benefit from this suffering and, while willing often to undertake first aid, are completely unwilling to do anything which will fundamentally challenge the system which allows this to happen. The theological counterpoint to this theme is that of theodicy - the attempt to justify God in the face of suffering rather than the attempt to do away with suffering, the attempt to bring the crucified peoples down from the cross.

Where does this leave our point about people getting what they deserve? It leaves us, perhaps, in a society which finds any notion of community difficult. This is perhaps true more in some parts of our society than others, those sectors where the achievement of individuals is most highly prized. The mind-set which puts this kind of premium upon individual achievement will also be the mind-set which is quickest to see blame in individual terms as well. Such an individualization of our existence must surely have its corollary in theological terms. The whole Protestant ethic thesis is based upon the replacement of community by individual as economic and also moral unit. The freeing of the individual from the shackles of medieval communality and unitary statehood brought with it an anarchy which was such a dynamic force in economic terms but which, when translated into theological and ethical terms, was quite unable to hang on to what had been positive in the common life which was being broken up by the Renaissance and the Reformation.

It is, therefore, that communality of life which liberation theology is trying to assert, coming as it does from a largely pre-industrial society and from a people predominantly Roman Catholic in religious affiliation. Where liberation theology runs into trouble, however, from the Roman Catholic church is where it begins to defy authority. In other words, it can only assert this communality of sin and suffering by producing its own share

of dynamic anarchy - to such an extent that Rome fears a second Reformation. The particular form which this dynamic anarchy takes in liberation theology is the mix it produces of theology and sociology. It is this use of the social sciences to interpret the life of the churches which is, to John Milbank and many others, anathema.

The outcome of this discussion is, therefore, to say that while the comment from the discussion groups came from a life which had had much suffering in it, and while it may be that the comment was part of an ongoing attempt to account for that suffering, there is also a way of accounting for it which has its roots in an analysis of society and of group relations within that society. The position which is advocated by Sobrino runs counter to this exactly because he argues for the bringing down from the cross of the crucified peoples. The other position justifies suffering because it becomes, in some way, deserved, part of the justice of God. Sobrino and Ellacuria argue that suffering is not at all part of the justice of God but rather diametrically opposed to it. The discussion in the various groups on the fourth servant song showed, though not perhaps in the obvious way anticipated that those who are nearer to a 'suffering' community (rather perhaps than near to a suffering individual) are more likely to see the need for a belief in God's justice which speaks of the removal of suffering rather than its sharing. For those with this view, there might have been

understanding of Sobrino's 'anthropodicy' after all.

C. The Last Judgement

In Liberating Exegesis: The Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies, (1990) Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner present two parables in cartoon or picture form, based on the slide presentations used in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The second of these is on Matthew 25:31-46, the passage which formed the basis for study five in the research project. The series of pictures tells of migrant workers transported by a plantation owner in an old and unroadworthy truck; an accident involving this truck draws peoples attention to the fact that this accident is but one among many; among these people are two church workers and their involvement in subsequent discussions about achieving better conditions comes to the attention of the plantation owner, who goes to complain to the priest; his complaint is of the involvement of these two in involvement with prisoners, the sick, even the village idiot and with the building of homes - they are interfering where they are not wanted; the priest reads a parable from the bible to explain the matter; the planatation owner is furious but the people support the two church workers.

The parable of the sheep and the goats is already about taking sides (or perhaps about being shown to have taken

sides) but the Brazilian account puts that taking of sides into a particular context. It is put into the context of the division between the rich and powerful, on the one hand, and of the poor and the powerless on the other. This is a division which has already been explored in section 3A above. What it does in Sao Paulo, however, is express the biblical message in ways readily understandable to those with whom work is being done. It shows up what was also alluded to in 3A, and that is the idea of differential truth. In the plantation owner's view, he has truth on his side: he feels that the role of church workers is not at all to be interfering with how he runs his business - he is not breaking the law, after all. The role of the church is worship and prayer. The way in which the parable is used here, however, points to an entirely different truth - it points to a truth which maintains the impossibility, certainly the inadvisability, of any separation of religion and politics. What is indicated here is the primacy of practice in Christian faith:

> "Christianity is a practice, an urgent action for the transformation of the world. The sheep are separated from the goats. Christian love cannot be neutral; it has to take sides." (Rowland and Corner, 1990, p.10f.)

How much support does this view receive in the study project? As before, the group nearest to the understanding offered by liberationism was Group C. This was particularly true when the group brought to bear immediately the relationship between oppression, power and money. The context into which they put it was the context of the weekly paypacket, controlled by the man and

resulting in oppression for the woman and the children through a denial for them of appropriate monetary and physical resources. This, in fact, is an area where much Latin American theology has been shown to be lacking - it has been willing to tackle political oppression and societal/economic oppression, but not the oppression of women by men. Group C managed, however, to reach just this conclusion. The parable became, for this group, a point of judgement for much so-called family life which they saw being lived around them. In essence this is a point which would not have produced any disagreement in either of the other groups. The point is, however, that neither of the other groups made this kind of connection. Indeed the whole contextualization of the parable in Rowland and Corner's account received no other equivalent in the groups' examination of the passage and the accompanying quotations.

The primacy of action, though, was a stumbling block almost everywhere. In Group B the primacy of faith was eventually affirmed and in Group C the recent convert found it very difficult to see any other way of approaching Christianity or indeed the kingdom of God. The point made in the studies about the mode of thinking in this parable being still a puzzle to us was completely confirmed - and my question about why this should be after two thousand years of thinking about it remained unanswered. Perhaps the answer to this lies in what is said above - we must first

have the ability to contextualize for ourselves and for our society and community before we are able to see the primacy of action. This will be returned to in the final chapter but it can be noted here that the connection between contextualization and praxis is an integral part of the discussion involving universal and local theology. It may turn out to be the case that this parable is not capable of being adequately understood while the only locus of interpretation is provided by universal theology.

The discussion of this parable raises, however, one other issue to which a return was promised - and that is the role and the idea of power. We saw in the Brazilian example of exegesis that power was seen to be in the hands of the plantation owner and that the way to reach out for justice was to do two things: one was to care for the victims created by his use of power and the other was to work at empowering others, an attempt in fact to oppose the plantation owner's power by raising up a countervailing power among the people. We saw also in the discussion in Group C that power was right at the heart of what they had to say about how a man treated his family. In economic terms this, in both cases, represents analysis of ownership and control.

Ownership of land or money or indeed any other kind of resource brings with it control over others who lack such resources. Such control is not always exercised - it can

be delegated by the owner to another but always in theory the control goes with the ownership. Indeed this is a test of whether ownership is really ownership - because if it does not bring control with it, it is only a facade or a mirage. Thus the debate about tokenism is opened up. Those who exercise power can sometimes appear to have ceded some of it to others - supposedly giving them control over a part of their lives which they did not have before. If, however, the size of the resource ceded is so small that no real control comes with the ownership, all that has happened is a token transfer of whatever kind and power has been perhaps more effectively retained for having seemed to release it.

Thus the example raised at one point in Group A of the freeing of the slaves in the United States: the point made was that many returned asking to be taken back because at least they would have a roof over their heads; but their freedom was so limited that in fact they found themselves with so little ownership of their own existence, so little control over their own lives, that in many ways they were worse off than before. In this sense we might ask if in certain parts of the United States the slaves have yet been freed. Another more recent and more local example would be that of those encouraged to 'own' their homes without the resources to support that commitment - far from this ownership resulting in control the outcome was for many that their lives went out of control.

When, therefore, we relate this to power, we can see that ownership is not the only issue or even perhaps the most important issue. The issue is much more that of control. Ownership does not necessarily provide it but is not really ownership without it - control is the determining factor. In the example brought up by the people in Group C the man, through his control of the monetary resources of the family, exercised control over the family. In the example from Sao Paulo the plantation owner exercised control not only over his plantation but also over the people who worked there; the 'interference' of the church annoyed him because it threatened his control. Empowerment of the people means, therefore, finding ways whereby they can exercise control. This, however, is essentially confrontational because control cannot be simultaneously retained and given away - it is a zero-sum calculation.

Essentially, therefore, this lies at the heart of this parable, the reason why liberation exegesis manages to say that the rich, the oppressors, can be identified as the goats: those who go to the aid of the hungry, the prisoners and the others do so in order to return to them the control they have lost or to give to them a control they never before enjoyed; those who do not are content for that control to remain in other hands and, whether or not they are actively involved in the oppression which has a controlling power over these people, they are nonetheless conniving with that power and are therefore part of the

same oppression. The ability to see this, however, depends upon experience. The nearer one is to the boundaries which control provides, the more one is aware of them, the more power becomes seen as a controlling influence (or even an oppressing one). Group C were aware of this through their own lives and through the lives of those around them. The other groups displayed less awareness of this although, as mentioned before, the comment in Group A about the power of school to categorize, restrict and control was a real and concrete demonstration of power at work. This is the epistemological privilege of the poor and the work of 'the sheep' is the bias of God toward them.

4. The poor in spirit.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit;
the kingdom of heaven is theirs." (Matthew 5:3)

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, this phrase about the poor in spirit was a continually recurring theme in the bible studies of the research project. This was so not because they were designed that way but because the participants returned to it again and again. It was also mentioned that the phrase was the cause of much confusion. This confusion, it seems to me, goes straight to the heart of debates about the epistemological privilege of the poor and, because of that, lies at the centre of the thesis of this work: that social class is an important factor in how the Christian message is received and understood. Within

the sessions of the research project, this phrase was returned to most often because it seemed to provide many with the evidence they required to say that their personal wealth was not an important issue within the faith, that what was important was 'in spirit'. They are supported by most commentaries. We can see the point by quoting from two exegetes who would be regarded normally as coming from quite different wings of biblical interpretation.

> "What our Lord is concerned about here is the spirit; it is poverty <u>of spirit</u>. In other words, it is ultimately a man's attitude towards himself. That is the thing that matters, not whether he is wealthy or poor."
>
> "We must be careful not to think that this beatitude calls actual material poverty a good thing ... The poverty which is blessed is the poverty <u>of spirit</u>, the spirit which realises its own utter lack of resources to meet life, and which finds its help and strength in God."

The first of these quotations comes from Martin Lloyd-Jones (1959, p.44) and the second from William Barclay (1958, p.87). The emphasis in each case is the authors own. It shows a remarkable convergence between two writers whose theological stances are often a considerable distance apart. This conjunction represents what I will argue in the next chapter is a dominant ideology within the church. It is an example of what George Soares-Prabhu means when he writes:

> "This tendency to spiritualize the poor of the Beatitudes which cuts across all denominational differences and brings together exegetes who would otherwise agree scarcely anything else, is a good indication of the extent to which exegetical trends are in fact determined by the spirit of the times. It may be a pointer too to the hermeneutical significance

of class." (in Sugirtharajah, 1991, p.155)

What we need to examine is how and where these considerations arose within the studies and from there begin to draw some conclusions about what this means for our present purposes. Are there, for example, differences between the different places where the studies took place? If so, what are they and in which directions do they point us?

In the first study, the quotation from Waldron Scott brought these issues to the fore. We saw how in Group A the presumption was made that any phrase containing the words poor or poverty must necessarily imply lack. The poor in spirit were therefore those lacking spirit in just the same way that those who are poor in goods lack the material resources for life. We saw also how the people here made a very clear distinction between the two groups. The same kind of assumptions were made in the pilot group and in Group B. Group C too had some of the same problems with the phrase in that the people there also thought of it as being a negative evaluation. They did, however, think that those who had nothing materially were left with nothing but trust in God. In a sense, therefore, they began to bridge the gap between seeing the spiritually poor as negative and as positive through a parallel linking between spiritual and material poverty. In other words, the only way to get at the positive connotation so obviously implied in the beatitudes is via a conjunction of

material and spiritual poverty.

In the third study, the same issue arose with regard to the quotation from Cosmas Desmond which states that only those suffering from oppression can know what the bible says about it. The idea that oppression gave anyone 'superiority' in spiritual matters was very difficult for at least one member of Group A and, in general, there was the feeling that whether or not oppression gave someone a better insight into oppression itself, it certainly did not provide someone with a better insight into the bible. Surprisingly, Desmond did not encounter any opposition in Group B. The discussion of this in Group C related the issue to wider issues of experience and understanding. It moved, as we saw, onto a discussion of 'calling' whereby those who were poor and oppressed had a mission to others who were in the same position. I went on earlier to make the connection between oppression and sin and it may be that it is in such a connection that we come to the real point of the epistemological privilege of the poor. The point is essentially Christological - that the poor and the oppressed are 'on the receiving end' of human sin and are therefore in the place to see as God in Christ sees. They are, in effect, in the place of Christ, the place from which Jesus of Nazareth saw the world.

In study four Moltmann returns to the theme of the importance of the poor and to the idea that it is to the

poor and the oppressed that all must look for liberation. This produced in Group A an alternative definition of the poor as those who had not got far in their relationship with God - and again we had returned to the difficulty with regard to the conjunction of material and spiritual poverty. This time, however, such a conjunction was approached with respect to the saying of Jesus that the poor would always be with us. In Group B the quotation from Moltmann met with an even less sympathetic response. Renewal and liberation did not by any means always come from below. Here there was also an attack on Boesak for his use of 'the poor in spirit' which returned to the earlier point where the phrase was seen in the negative light of being a description of distance from God. The comments from Boesak also produced comment in Group C - or at least produced question. This was in the context of a recurring confusion about how the 'poor' related to the 'poor in spirit'.

The sixth study brought an interesting point in this regard - that when reference was made to the poor being always with us there was never any question but that this meant the materially poor. This contrasted with the point so often made about the poor in the beatitudes being the spiritually poor - however defined. We therefore have to ask if the two passages from the bible are to be linked in this way or if their definitions of the poor can indeed be safely left at different levels.

We have thus identified two different questions arising from the group discussions in relation to the poor in spirit. The first is the question of how or if the phrase can be seen to be positive. The second is how or if the poor in spirit can be related to the materially poor - with reference here to the saying from Jesus about the poor always being with us. There may also be a third consideration, however, which will help us here - and that is the issue of whether or not there is a distinction to be drawn between people and their situation. In other words, when Jesus talks about the poor, is it right to jump from there to a consideration of poverty? Might it be helpful to remember that it is the poor who are said to be blessed and not the poverty which makes them poor? The debate about epistemological privilege can in this way be kept off the road which might begin to lead us to the point where we say that poverty itself is a holy state.

What began to appear in the discussions in Group C was the thought that not only did the poor and the oppressed have a special knowledge which arose from their particular experience but that this in itself gave them a particular task to perform. This in itself might begin to justify the title 'blessed'. The place where such thinking began to arise may therefore be significant - the place where poverty and the poor were best known, the place where such insight was available. Might this be a small-scale example of exactly what liberation theology is trying to say? To

explore this further we can turn now to Soares-Prabhu and to Jon Sobrino.

Soares-Prabhu begins his article, "Class in the Bible: The Biblical Poor a Social Class?" by stating that liberation theology has re-opened for exegesis the social, economic and political dimensions of the bible. This has two complementary aspects - an awareness of the sociological factors behind the bible's creation and construction and, secondly, an awareness of the sociological factors at work when we read the bible.

> "Words inevitably evoke specific resonances in each reader, which are coloured by his personal experiences and shaped by his particular world-view." (in Sugirtharajah, 1991, p.148)

What, he says, liberation theology has done has been to take this insight of modern hermeneutics and set it in the context of class analysis. Soares-Prabhu concentrates on the first of the two aspects mentioned above whereas this thesis is primarily concerned with the second. What he has to say has significance for our project here, however, when put in tandem with the results of the study project referred to above. This is because his arguments about the class nature of biblical references to the poor are themselves acceptable or otherwise depending on where those listening are standing - that is, on what experiences their judgements of reliability or credibility are based. If, in their own lives, they know social class to be a real and determining fact of existence, they will be more willing to accept that same reality when it is presented to them

within the biblical canon.

A second part of this process whereby experience dictates the plausibility structures within which we operate is in the experience we have of life as being confrontational or cooperative.

> "There is much in the Bible to suggest that the poor there are given the same confrontational and creative historical role that Karl Marx assigns to the working class in capitalist society." (in Sugirtharajah, 1991, p.149)

If this is so then the poor thus defined are in the spirit because of their role in overcoming the oppression which is inherent in this kind of societal arrangement. The poor in spirit thus become those whose actions simply by dint of their lack of the goods of this world become a challenge to a sinful and greedy generation. To use a phrase from Marx himself, those who have nothing to lose but their chains are a call to the church first and then to the whole society to kenosis. This will be interpreted by those who have considerably more to lose than chains as a threat. In this way, therefore, the call of God to live the values of the kingdom or reign of God is a divisive or even antagonistic challenge. Such a call is liberation, however, not only for the poor but for all. Soares-Prabhu goes on:

> "the Bible does not (as other religions tend to do) merely present the poor as deserving of human concern ... Nor does it (as do other expressions of popular wisdom) merely point to the plight of the poor as warning against wastefulness and sloth ... Victims of human history, the poor, as the Bible defines them, are also those through whom that history is redeemed." (in Sugirtharajah, 1991, p.151f.)

Jon Sobrino takes this idea in The True Church and the Poor (1984). Sobrino argues that his formula of 'the church of the poor' is not a segment or an offshoot of the whole church but rather a way of talking about the whole church when it is formed on the basis of the poor. In this way of understanding the poor become the basis for understanding truth and Christian practice. This is because, says Sobrino,

> "the poor have the final say about what is ultimate in Christianity - namely, love - about what love really is, about its necessary historical mediations, about its different expressions." (Sobrino, 1984, p.94)

What this implies, therefore, is the same thing as was put in rather more concrete terms by Cosmas Desmond, that those on the receiving end of human sin are the only ones who can adequately interpret human existence for everyone else. This is because only they can interpret the loving response which is required.

Sobrino spends a good deal of time defending himself against the notion that what he is proposing might be a threat to the unity of the church. We can, perhaps, see visions of accusations of his being a heretic or at least a schismatic floating around at the back or even at the front of his mind here. Out of this defence, however, grows an understanding of love and its proper expression. He argues that love which is empty of all content is not love at all. Re-creation, which is the task and the nature of love, cannot be accomplished by an easy acceptance of the ways of the world as they are. What is required is

kenosis. Self-emptying is the way to re-creation because it makes room for what is new:

> "poverty and impoverishment are the structural channels of holiness, and holiness cannot come into existence except through these channels." (Sobrino, 1984, p.109)

In other words, what is being said here is that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit because through the poor and through their eyes all may see the true choice which we face. That choice is between an existence which is full of self and an idea of love which is empty - or a self which has been emptied and a love which is full. Sobrino clearly opts for the latter, for what he describes as, "a salvific kenosis" (p.137). The answer to a centripetal economic and social system for the world being in centrifugal theology.

What is arrived at here, therefore, is the debate with which this whole thesis started - the debate between universal and local theology. Sobrino is arguing that a universal theology without local and specific application is useless and dead. It could be said that this is a reformulation of the judgement in the epistle of James on faith without works. Sobrino goes further than this, however, by suggesting that not only does universal theology have to be grounded in a specific location and set of circumstances but that there is one particular set of circumstances in which universal theology finds its truest application and realisation. That is the set of circumstances in which the poor find themselves. It is

therefore from there that the whole church must define its being. This is why the poor in spirit are blessed - because the place which they occupy in the world provides them with a special way of knowing - an epistemological privilege.

This privilege comes in Sobrino's scheme from the relationship mentioned before which the poor have to sin. When one is on the receiving end of human sin, especially in its structural form, ones priority is not so much to understand or explain it but rather to abolish it. This returns us to the claim of liberation theology to have a distinctive theodicy. The poor are blessed because poverty is sinful. This, in turn, is what leads to liberation theology's turn to social science - the important thing is to understand the situation of sin:

> "If ... the concern is the liberation of the real world from its wretched state, theology will turn spontaneously to the social sciences. For they analyze the concrete misery of the real world, the mechanisms that create it, and consider possible models of liberation from it." (Sobrino, 1984, p.19)

The important point here is to deal with reality rather than with meaning. It is this emphasis on reality, on dealing with sin rather than on understanding it, this different way of approaching theodicy, which means that a specific type of practice ensues which in turn leads into a theology of liberation. The starting point is the position of the poor and their epistemological privilege:

> "Wretched conditions and a situation of sin and oppression prove paradoxically to be the locus of encounter with God." (Sobrino, 1984, p.27)

How does all this fit with the discussions in the study groups? It is interesting that no mention was made of the poor in spirit when the groups discussed the second study - and yet we have arrived at the position of saying that the subject of theodicy (with which we were concerned there) is the vital point of departure for an understanding of the poor in spirit. As we noted earlier in this chapter, it was the individualization of our view of sin and suffering which sets much European theology apart from liberation theology. We need to be able to see suffering as inimical to God's justice rather than as part of it.

The point earlier which needs to be repeated here was that social class seemed to have at least some role to play in the availability of this insight. To have faith in a God who removes suffering was seen by some to tread extremely dangerous ground while to others it seemed only natural. The hermeneutical significance of class to which Soares-Prabhu referred is important here but not, I feel, if left unadorned. What we need to understand is how it is that such hermeneutical significance can be disguised or even unnoticed, how the interpretation which comes out of a certain and particular experience can begin to assume universal proportions. What are the mechanisms which power this kind of spread and assimilation of ideas? And how are such mechanisms relevant to the life of the church in Scotland today? It is to this that we turn in the next chapter where we can look further at questions of power and

influence, about who are guardians of tradition and about what keeps them in that position. Segundo took the themes of European theology and combined them in his hermeneutical approach. Central to that appropriation of ideas was his work on suspicion. We have seen thus far that it has been Group C which was nearest to those ideas because it was that group which felt it best understood power and its operation. We can now begin to look at the mechanisms which support the influence of ideas and, in the final chapter, at what the church might be able to do to challenge such mechanisms. In other words, can the church develop sufficiently a hermeneutic of suspicion which will allow the appropriation here which Segundo seeks to attain? It is the contention of this thesis that it is in addressing mechanisms of power and influence that we can best approach such a task - and to this we turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TEN: DOMINANT IDEOLOGY AND MEANING SYSTEMS

This chapter will consider the arguments, principally, of two writers - Antonio Gramsci and Frank Parkin. Both are concerned with power in society and with how that power is used in the realm of understanding and meaning. This is the realm within which this thesis seeks to operate and therefore this chapter will attempt to show that the analyses provided by these two men for society can be applied also to the church. Biblical interpretation and hermeneutics are, of course, centrally concerned with meaning and understanding and our consideration here will take us from the type of understanding evinced by Soares-Prabhu where interpretation depends entirely on social background to an understanding which allows for influence and the spread and assimilation of ideas - in other words an understanding which takes power seriously, one which can account for the types of evidence produced by the study project, and perhaps for a more nuanced approach to class than that normally employed in liberation theology. Indeed much of this chapter will tread in a more considered way the ground which was mapped out in chapter one. The application of these theories of power to the empirical material is left for the most part to the end of this chapter.

Mary Douglas, in a series of lectures in Edinburgh University in 1989, argued that, "the truth of a myth is that its patterns match the patterns of social processes." She sees the bible as the source of conflicting claims (social rather than intellectual) and uses this as the foundation for a 'claims theory of knowledge'. These claims are claims to loyalty and support - claims which link the establishment of knowledge with the establishment of community. Douglas's theme here is therefore very similar to that of Peter Berger whose 'plausibility structures' argue that knowledge is social and that only socially supported knowledge can survive. What Douglas seeks to point us toward is, however, the role of power in claims - social power becomes translated into epistemological power. This power therefore becomes power to exclude - power to exclude alternative claims to understanding and to interpretation.

This power of exclusion brings us to the central theme of this thesis - that the fact that knowledge is tied in to social processes and structures means that those parts of a society which have power can define what knowledge is acceptable and exclude that which is not. The reactions of the poor to the church - as witnessed to by H. Richard Niebuhr, when he wrote on the social sources of denominationalism (1929); Robertson, discussing the church

in Edinburgh (1968); Wickham, discussing Sheffield (1957, 1964) and many others - is evidence of a clear sense of exclusion. This leads to what must be a vital discussion of theories of dominant ideology with their concomitant use of the idea of hegemony which also informs the claims theories of knowledge used by Mary Douglas.

"The ideas of the ruling class are, in any epoch, the ruling ideas." So wrote Karl Marx in The German Ideology and in that one short sentence allowed much of the more humanist thought which claimed its descent from him and sought to oppose the more determinist ways of thinking to which Marx also gave birth. In one sense he is saying much the same as various other sociological thinkers when he adds that, "it is not consciousness that determines life but life that determines consciousness," but at the time this was a very clear challenge to the idealist thought which ruled the roost, which was the dominant ideology. It is also, even today, a move forward from the determinism which we might have detected in what George Soares-Prabhu had to say about hermeneutics and their determined relationship to class background. Theories of dominant ideology steer a middle course between idealism and determinism. Perhaps the most influential figure in the current century to have developed such a theory is Antonio Gramsci.

In fact, there are those such as David Forgacs (1988) who

argue that Gramsci's theories of hegemony are not part of the wider spectrum of thought on dominant ideology. Forgacs insists that Gramsci sees hegemony in terms of inclusion and persuasion rather than in terms of force or conspiracy. However, when Marx and Engels talk of workers who kiss their chains they are surely referring to a situation where cooption has taken place and succeeded in making people, whose interests are not served by a certain way of organising the relations of production, believe that things are indeed the best way they could be. Gramsci uses hegemony in many different contexts and in varying ways but my inclination is to side with Abercrombie et.al.(1980), quoted in chapter one, when they describe hegemony in terms which combine persuasion and force. Of course the term begins with Bolshevik theory in Russia to describe the role of the proletariat but with Gramsci it is broadened to include the role of any dominant group within society. With Gramsci also the use of the term hegemony moves specifically into the realm of ideas. He writes, "the theoretical-practical principle of hegemony has also epistemological significance ... The realization of a hegemonic apparatus, in so far as it creates a new ideological terrain, determines a reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge." (Forgacs, 1988, p.192) Such a comment inevitably leads, therefore, to an inclusion of the subject of ideology:

> "For the philosophy of praxis, ideologies are anything but arbitrary; they are real historical facts which must be combatted and their nature as instruments of domination revealed, not for reasons of morality

etc., but for reasons of political struggle." (Forgacs, 1988, p.196)

In other words, there is no discussion concerning hegemony which does not involve ideology and no discussion of ideology which does not involve domination and opposition.

Importantly, Gramsci then moves on to 'earth' his talk of ideologies - he is not willing that what he is saying should be dismissed as merely concerned with superstructure:

> "One must .. distinguish between historically organic ideologies, those, that is, which are necessary to a given structure, and ideologies that are arbitrary, rationalistic, 'willed'." (in Forgacs, 1988, p.199)

To reinforce this interdependence between base and superstructure, Gramsci adds his definition of the conception of the 'historical bloc':

> "in which precisely material forces are the content and ideologies are the form, though this distinction between form and content has purely indicative value, since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces." (in Forgacs, 1988, p.200)

What is under discussion here, therefore, is the role of ideas and beliefs within a society and how those ideas and beliefs are influenced by and influence the economic and political structure of that society.

Power

The role of power is central to this. What is necessary, Gramsci is saying, is a realisation that the power of ideas is part of economic and political power. Before returning

to Gramsci, however, it will be worth at this point seeing what Steven Lukes (1974) has to say on the subject of power. Lukes discusses power in terms of dimensions. Such a discussion takes its point of departure from behaviourism - indeed Lukes wishes to depart quite a distance from it. The view of behaviourism is, he says, one-dimensional:

> "a focus on behaviour in the making of decisions on issues over which there is an observable conflict of (subjective) interests, seen as express policy preferences, revealed by political participation." (Lukes, 1974, p.15)

A two-dimensional view provides a qualified critique of this:

> "[it] allows for consideration of the ways in which decisions are prevented from being taken on potential issues over which there is observable conflict of (subjective) interests, seen as embodied in express policy preferences and sub-political grievances." (Lukes, 1974, p.20)

A three-dimensional view provides, says Lukes, a much more thoroughgoing critique of behaviourism:

> "[it] allows for consideration of the many ways in which potential issues are kept out of politics, whether through the operation of social forces and institutional practices or through individuals' decisions." (Lukes, 1974, p.24)

Once we reach the three-dimensional stage of Lukes' argument, we are in the realm where the best interests of at least some people are never allowed to reach anyone's agenda - least of all the people themselves. Equally we have reached the point where the interests of some people are defined by other people and action taken on the basis of that definition. Lukes is talking in terms of the political arena but we might want to ask if the same could not be true of the church. Lukes wants to argue that it

can be legitimate, in spite of all the inherent dangers, for one group to operate in the interests of another - even against the wishes of the second group. We might want to ask if such a view can be sustained, but for now the central point which he makes is what is important: that power can prevent people thinking certain things, as well as prevent them doing certain things. This is hegemony - the control of the options open for consideration and the consequent power over the decisions made. This control, or power, is the property not of individuals but of groups, says Hannah Arendt (Lukes, 1974, p.28); and Parsons, with his functionalist views of homogeneity and concensus, wishes to see power as the power to move forward together to achieve commonly agreed goals. Giddens, however, criticizes Parsons for his omission from consideration of the exercise of power to serve sectional interests (Lukes, 1974, p.30). In other words, Parsons does not allow for the existence, never mind the exercise, of hegemonic power. Perhaps those who sit at the centre of such power never do. We certainly discovered a much more developed and critical awareness of power in the study group which could be seen as nearest to power's limitation.

Common Sense

Gramsci takes us a step further forward when he turns his attention to what might be an examination of why it is that those who are at the centre of an hegemony do not seem to recognize its existence - he turns his attention to common

sense. This issue was raised in chapter one of the present work where it was seen to be part of the attack on Marshall et.al. for their suggestion that social class continues to be an important, or even the important, factor in modern-day Britain. Gramsci's use of the term begins to look at what we might understand to be the use, or indeed the misuse, of common sense. Firstly he begins by putting the same point which Berger puts:

> "In aquiring one's conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting." (in Forgacs, 1988, p.325)

It is important to note here that he is not saying that all will invariably think the same. What he is saying is that all within a social grouping will share the same mode of thinking. He then goes on to consider the role of language in this. He considers in particular the role of dialect in its relationships with what he calls 'standard language'. Only proper mastery of standard language can put one in touch with, "the major thoughts which dominate world history," (in Forgacs, 1988, p.327). This is Gramsci's attempt to move people from the parochial to the universal but in the context of common sense we might ask if he is really trying to say that there is a common sense so common that it is indeed universal. Later, however, he wants to say that there is not at all one single common sense because common sense is a historical product. It can also, importantly for the current project, be the result of a history of domination:

> "the social group in question may indeed have its own

> conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally in flashes - when, that is, the group is acting as an organic totality. But this same group has, for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group," (in Forgacs, 1988, p.328)

Let us pull out a little of what he is saying here. There are three elements of common sense, all of which are important for this study:

a) the sense we make of the world is not individual but grows out of our involvement in a social group;

b) the sense we make of the world depends to a considerable extent on the linguistic tools available to us to express that sense;

c) a dominant group can impose the sense it has of the world on subordinate groups.

The first point is part of all the work looked at in this chapter. The second and third, however, begin to move us on a little. One curious point to make is that Gramsci does not seem to recognize the connection between b and c. The idea that language and its use can be a tool of oppression and domination does not seem to be part of his concern. Rather his concern seems to be that those who rely purely on dialect should be emancipated from that imprisonment in order to avail themselves of the feast which awaits their understanding in the world of standard language. In other words, he sees standard language as part of liberation whereas it can just as well be seen as part of oppression. In fact he sees it as the job of the 'organic intellectual' (to whom we shall return in the

final chapter) to develop the language, and the sense, of those with whom he works so that it can avail itself of the riches which await. Philosophy, Gramsci argues, can draw out the good sense within common sense, the healthy nucleus (as he puts it), "which deserves to be made more unitary and coherent." (in Forgacs, 1988, p.329)

Perhaps, however, if we were to understand what Gramsci describes as dialect more in terms of ways of thinking than in forms of language then we might begin to make some headway. What Gramsci is attempting to provide is a strategy for those in dominated social groups to challenge the hegemony of dominant social groups - at the level of ideas. In this he is challenging those who are dominated to overturn Marx's dictum that the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas. He sees, however, no alternative strategy to that of moving the ways of thought of the ruled to the place where the thought of the rulers already is:

> "The philosophy of praxis does not tend to leave the 'simple' in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but rather to lead them to a higher conception of life." (Forgacs, 1988, p.333)

In spite of the almost Pauline sound to this sentence, it is surely quite recognizable that it represents a form of thought which cedes to the dominant class an immediate advantage - it says to them, 'you have a form of thought which is superior to our form of thought and we intend to remove you from your position by taking over the way you think'. The answer from a biblical perspective is the

Pauline thought contained in 1st Corinthians which speaks of the foolishness of God. It is the same answer which is spoken of by liberation theology when it talks of ecclesiatical kenosis - the answer which says that it is not enough to move those at the periphery to the centre, but rather the centre must be moved.

This, then, is the problem with a too rigid account of the dominant ideology thesis - that it cedes to a dominant group a perpetual domination which can only be broken by another group in its turn becoming dominant. Of course this is precisely what Lenin wished for the idea of hegemony. Hegemony was to be the hegemony of the proletariat. What, however, we saw in Lenin's creation was the hegemony of the Communist Party which, rather than produce a new way of thinking, took over many of the methods and reproduced many of the results of the system of domination which it replaced. That a too rigid account of the dominant ideology thesis does not help us is, however, no reason to dismiss it in all its forms. There needs to be an alternative to the extremes which say, on the one hand, that society operates on concensus and shared values and goals and, on the other, that the ideology of the ruling group is so dominant that not only does it appear as the best way of understanding social life but it appears as the only way of doing so. The groups in our study certainly displayed enough difference to merit further consideration of this area.

The concrete and the active

Gramsci's problem is the church's problem. He sought to develop a way of making the ideas of a marginalized social group coherent enough to challenge the ideas of those who had marginalized them. His task, however, was not simply to take on what was said - it was also educational. When we come in the last chapter to discuss the mission of the church in the light of all that has been said so far, we will find that the difficulties of mixing these two tasks still remain. Before reaching that stage, however, the major task remains of tying in the discussion of this chapter with what has gone before. It would be convenient to be able to say that each of the study groups presented a different way of looking at the bible and indeed at the world - but such a statement would not quite fit. In fact, as was mentioned earlier, reality tends to be more complicated than this, thus contradicting the more determinist tendencies of some liberationist writing. Because it is more complicated, theories such as those of Parsons are the easiest to set aside in this regard. It was clear that the kind of common sense which he presumed in his work was not present. Nor, indeed, is there a common commitment which might allow Parsons' thought an entry via Polanyi who argued (1958) that shared moral values and thus common sense depend on shared goals. Berger's thoughts on plausibility structures begin to approach what might be seen as an adequate explanation but would not explain one central feature. That feature is

that, while the social support of ideas and ways of thinking was evident in certain circumstances, it did not pertain in others. What was shown in the group studies was that the more general the point being made the less likely it was to produce disagreement. The responses to Anthony Archer in Study 3 were instructive in this regard: one group maintained its resistance to ideas of class analysis in the church, one group began to change its mind from an earlier disregard for such analysis, the third group began to develop its previous acceptance of ideas of class into a more focussed critique of the way the church operates. This tendency can begin to develop for us a train of thought which leads on from the thoughts of Gramsci on hegemony to a method for the development of alternatives to ideological domination.

This method is crucially concerned with the move from the theoretical and the contemplative to the concrete and the active. What we discovered in the studies was that the status of accepted and acceptable common sense or even common knowledge could only be challenged when specific instances were invoked or particular action recommended. There are various writers who have already pointed in this direction. These include Paolo Freire (1972), Charles Elliott (1987) and Howard Davis (1978).

Freire sets his critique within the realm of education and puts his emphasis on the degree to which that education is

either active or passive. Passive education is what is referred to by Freire as narrative education based on a "banking concept". In this the person 'receiving' the education is seen as a receptive container waiting to be filled with static reality. This is a process, he says, of indoctrination which leads to adaptation and acceptance. The answer is to adopt a problem-solving practice of education which focusses on limit-situations - that is on those situations where some are served directly or indirectly and others are negated or curbed. The answer, in other words, is to focus on the specific and to focus on the specific which has a direct bearing on the lives of those involved and concerned.

Howard Davis makes the same kind of connections when he addresses the notion of images of society. In this he follows writers such as Popitz and Bahrdt:

> "They do not presuppose a correspondance between images of society and class relations defined in terms of market or economic criteria ... Instead they draw attention to the workers' experience ... and attribute an important role to the image in actively making sense of this experience of work, institutions and social relations in their particular as well as their general aspects." (Davis, 1978, p.11)

Here again it is the particular which is regarded as important. What is vital is how meaning is created - and whose meaning is being used. The idea of an image, Davis says, is that it combines the ideas of reflection and creation; it is not, therefore, simply to be seen as something accepted from without. And because it contains an element of creation it is inevitable that the

ingredients of that creation will be quite specific. The next question to consider, however, is that of what goes in to such a creative process.

This is a question to which Charles Elliott (1987) addresses himself in his book, Comfortable Compassion?. It is when he addresses the issue of power that he refers to what he regards as the answer to 'assymetrical power': alternative consciousness. Now in order to make sense of such a notion we perhaps need to ask: alternative to what? The answer is not dissimilar to the previous discussion of power in this chapter - the hegemonic power of the rulers of the world. In the context in which Elliott is writing, that of biblical attitudes to power of this kind, the phrase which often appears is 'principalities and powers'. It is a phrase with an overlay of oppositional meaning. The alternative consciousness, therefore, is one which is alternative to that of the rulers and to the ruling ideas. Elliott considers how such a consciousness is forged. Firstly, he says that consciousness is not an individual but a collective, a social, creation. He says also that it is forged as alternative by seeing "power from the standpoint of the victim of the abuse of power." (Elliott, 1987, p.123) And thirdly he says that consciousness is forged in action. It may be that certainly the second of these can best be considered in the final chapter, but we can see in the first and the third a development of the theme which has been running through this chapter - that

all consciousness is social and that oppositional or alternative consciouness is forged in the specific and in action. Frank Parkin develops this thinking further.

Meaning Systems: Parkin

In his book, Class Inequality and Political Order (1971), Parkin includes a chapter on "Class Inequality and Meaning Systems". He considers the findings of various other writers, including the unitary value system espoused by Parsons of which mention has already been made. He mentions Merton who:

> "suggests that a major source of tension in modern society lies in the fact that members of the subordinate class internalize the same values as the dominant class, but lack the means for realizing them." (Parkin, 1971, p.80)

He then goes on to point to the very nub of the problem behind much of what Gramsci was saying - that without this kind of acceptance on the part of subordinate classes of the values of dominant classes, domination would be reduced to being sustained by means of coercion and physical force. He seeks to discover, therefore, why it is that moral values flow down rather than up between social classes. Facts, he says (p.81), do not of themselves provide meaning, what is required is an anlysis of the meaning systems by which those facts are understood. He delineates three meaning systems:

- the dominant value system;

- the subordinate value system;
- the radical value system.

These are used to define approaches to class inequality. Parkin places each of them within their social source: the dominant value system comes from what he describes as the major institutional order and promotes either deference or aspiration among the members of the subordinate class; the subordinate value system comes from the local working-class community and promotes accommodation; the radical value system has its roots in the working class political party and promotes opposition. It is important in this discussion to realise that all of these value systems play a part in the views of the subordinate class but equally important to realise that their different sources are highly relevant.

The dominant value system

This system may be found within the subordinate class but its point of origin is in the dominant class. For all its internal differentiation, says Parkin, the dominant class will have a near universal acceptance of its own ways and tastes as being 'right' and this, with that class's access to means of communication, will have a tendency to be spread throughout society:

> "dominant values tend to set the standard for what is considered to be objectively 'right'. This holds not only for the rules governing the distribution of rewards but also for many other aspects of social life. In the sphere of music, for example ... in the allocation of national resources to the arts, or of honours to their practioners ... what counts as the grammar of the language ... These examples serve to

> illustrate that what is essentially an evaluative matter can be transformed into an apparently factual one by virtue of the legitimating powers of the dominant class." (Parkin, 1971, p.84)

Parkin too acknowledges the link between power and the authority of ideas. The question then becomes one of what one does with such authoritative ideas once they have become established. Parsons would take them as evidence of social cohesion, a unitary structure of value - and indeed Parkin makes the point that many would agree that if social consensus is the result, it is a result with many advantages. He also points out, however, what has already been said in this chapter - that the exercise of power is not thus to be legitimized; the ends do not justify the means.

Of course if we take what is said by Durkheim on anomie, by Berger on the role of religion to provide order in the midst of chaos, and by Wilson on the role of religion to provide community in a depersonalized world, we might begin to find more support than might be anticipated for a Parsonian approach to all of this. For if coherence in society is to be prized, if each is to be made to feel a valuable and valued part of the whole no matter how lowly the station, then perhaps the end might indeed begin to justify the means. Berger's thoughts on plausibility structures would suggest that if the ideas of a whole society come together in this way then there is evidence of a remarkable degree of cohesion. Wilson's fears of a disintegrating society, where religion is needed to create

a sense of community which otherwise would be lacking, would surely be unfounded if it could be shown that a single value structure accounted for an entire population. Durkheim's analysis of anomie would not be necessary if dominant values were universal values. But here we reach the point - dominant values are not universal values. If they were, then Wilson and Durkheim would have been analyzing phantoms; Berger's thoughts on plausibility structures would not have been couched in terms of cognitive deviance. It is the presumption that lack of opposition means agreement which makes the domination of the values of one group into something which can be understood as oppression. That is why Gramsci's writing on the subject of hegemony is so vital. In order to understand the workings of this oppression Parkin goes in to which groups within the subordinate class are most likely to accept the values of the dominant class as their own.

There are two types of model within which the dominant value system can be seen to be accepted within the subordinate class. These are <u>deferential</u> and <u>aspirational</u>. The deferential model seems to occur where there is direct contact with the dominant class. This would be seen at its most obvious in an 'upstairs/downstairs' establishment where the deference of servants, particularly those who have risen one or more steps up the ladder, is the stuff of legend. To show that it is not merely legend, however,

reference can be made to other work situations such as rural or farming communities where ones position in the community is well known and generally accepted (farm servant, tenant farmer, small farmer, landowner). When Colin Bell and Howard Newby (1973) discuss deference they ask if it is to be regarded as a form of behaviour or as a set of attitudes. It is important, they say, not to confuse the two since a person can behave deferentially without having any deferential attitudes at all. They draw attention to Goffmann's thoughts on behaviour which is 'on-stage' and that which is 'off-stage'. Bell and Newby agree with Parkin that deference should be regarded as:

> "[referring] to individuals who endorse a moral order which legitimises their own political, material and social subordination. It is the commitment to such a moral order which we shall understand by the use of the term deference." (Bell and Newby, 1973, p.233)

Aspirational interpretations, Parkin says, come from a quite different set of social circumstances. He instances two sets of such circumstances: one is where a family is downwardly mobile, where a window has been opened on a materially more secure or socially more prestigious lifestyle but which is now out of reach; the other is among those who are marginal to the subordinate class, those who have some authority over others within the subordinate class but who are not part of the dominant class. (Of course Parkin was writing well before the advent of the yuppie and the fast easy money of the 1980's and were we still in the eighties we might want to say that his analysis was now out of date. As the bubble burst,

however, it soon became obvious that the upward mobility of the yuppie was distinctly limited and the redundancies, when they came, were a savage reminder that they were living on borrowed time as well, perhaps, as on borrowed money. Parkin's analysis of the downwardly mobile is therefore remarkably contemporary.)

The subordinate value system

When he turns to the subordinate value system, Parkin moves our attention to what he describes as 'the local working class community'. Bell and Newby would prefer to refer to local social systems, having accepted Margaret Stacey's criticism (1969) of the term community, but whichever term is used we can recognize that here we have moved from the predominantly rural emphasis of much of what was described above to an urban, though not necessarily industrial, setting. What is promoted here is neither deference nor aspiration but rather accommodation. This, like the value system to which it is attached, is an intermediate term. Accommodation neither supports nor opposes the status quo but encompasses various levels of adaptation to a system which is recognized as being faulty but which, it is realised, is unlikely to be changed. Thus we have here a forerunner of the informed fatalism discussed by Marshall et.al. in their much more recent study (1988). This adaptation allows life to go on without either resentment or, indeed, hope - things are as they are and there is no use worrying about how they might be. This is not,

however, to be construed as in any way positive about how things are. It leans heavily on an understanding of 'them and us' and represents a fundamental questioning of the morality of privilege and what Elliott refers to as 'asymmetrical power'. Such moral questions do not however, in this analysis, lead to active political attack. Parkin disagrees with those who would wish to read into this 'them and us' outlook a nascent class consciousness, using Westergaard in his support to point out that class consciousness and community consciousness are not the same thing at all. Indeed we might remember here the point drawn earlier in this work where we looked at Lenin's distinction between trade union and social democratic consciousness. Parkin himself mentions instrumental collectivism - the outcome of trade union consciousness where collective bargaining tries to gain as much as possible from 'them' for 'us'. This does nothing, however, to challenge the fundamental nature of the way society is organised, indeed it can be argued that it underlines rather than undermines. Such a strategy of bargaining on behalf of workers, says Parkin:

> "does not call into question the values underlying the existing reward structure, not does it pose any threat to the institutions which support this structure. Trade unionism could in fact be said to stabilize the modern capitalist system by legitimizing further the rules and procedures which govern the allocation of resources." (Parkin, 1971, p.91)

All this, in Parkin's submission, leads to a 'negotiated version' of the dominant value system. That system is not opposed but rather modified. The values contained are

recognized not to fit the lives of those in the subordinate class but yet the power of the dominant value system within such institutions as education and the media (we will come to the church later) is such that no coherent challenge can be produced. This dichotomy between existential conditions and theoretical analyses means a choice which it is not always easy to make. Here, however, Parkin suggests the basis on which the choice often is made:

> "it could be hypothesized that in situations where purely abstract evaluations are called for, the dominant value system will provide the moral frame of reference; but in concrete social situations involving choice and action, the negotiated version - or the subordinate value system - will provide the moral framework." (Parkin, 1971, p.93)

He goes on to draw our attention to the differences between what working-class youths will give as their 'fantasy' future, the kind of occupation they would have in a utopia with all possibilities open, and the future they expect to have. This distinction is clear in the figures drawn out of the Lifestyle Survey in chapter one. He also mentions the common occurence of workers criticizing trade unions and their influence in general and compares it with the equally common occurrence of workers who insist on trade union action with regard to their particular grievance. (The current writer can bear witness to this phenomenon in his own experience as a shop steward.) Such ambivalence is central to Parkin's thesis and indeed central to the thesis being developed here:

> "[is it] more plausible to speak of a common value system shared by all classes, or a class differentiated value system. To some extent the answer will depend on the level of generality at which

the inquiry is pitched." (Parkin, 1971, p.95)

The important difference to be noticed is that the choice for members of the subordinate class is between a moral system which originates in a lifestyle not their own and a situational experience which is their own. Class power is at the heart of the matter but class opposition is not seen as the answer. As Pahl and Wallace (1988) pointed out, there is no clear and unambiguous link between attitude and behaviour.

The radical value system

Parkin's third meaning system is contained in what he refers to as the radical value system. This, he says, arises from the mass political party based on the subordinate class:

> "the radical value system purports to demonstrate the systematic nature of class inequality, and attempts to reveal a connectedness between man's personal fate and the wider political order." (Parkin, 1971, p.97)

Here, therefore, we are moving to the kind of area which Gramsci wished to occupy. Parkin says that whereas the subordinate value system operates very much on a localized basis, the radical value system wishes to incorporate a whole class. This is the same kind of move which Gramsci made when he moved from dialect to standard language - it is the move from the particular to the general (though we may wish to argue later that the general ought to be discernable within the particular). It is interesting to note that Parkin looks to continental Europe for his paradigm here - with its mass movements, traditions, heroes

and songs, all of which provide a counterweight to the power of the dominant value system. Such a movement provides not only meaning but a feeling of personal dignity and worth which the dominant value system cannot offer. Here Parkin is once again arguing the same point as Lenin, saying that the subordinate class requires leadership if it is to raise its sights and broaden its horizons:

> "it seems plausible to suggest that if socialist parties ceased to present a radical, class-oriented meaning- system to their supporters, then such an outlook would not persist of its own accord among the subordinate class." (Parkin, 1971, p.98)

Parkin argues that it is not the case that political parties reflect the views of those they seek to represent, but that rather the view of the party provides meaning and understanding to those it seeks to represent - it offers an interpretation of the world and asks people to endorse it in the face of pressure from competing meaning systems. Only, then, with such support and leadership can the subordinate class move to the outcome of the radical value system - which is <u>opposition</u>.

<u>Meaning systems and the church</u>

Parkin suggests that members of the subordinate class have a view of the world and of society which is a mixture of all three meaning systems. He argues that it is important that all three should have a continued existence. He ponders the result of the third stream (radical value system) running dry and thinks that this would mean that the subordinate value system would be the major source of

understanding for the subordinate class and the deradicalization of the working class would be well under way. What will be interesting for us, however, will be to see how his scheme matches the data collected in the studies. Particularly it will be important now to develop the thought of ideological (or even theological) domination within the church and to look both at the ways in which that has manifested itself and at the pointers suggested thus far for overcoming that domination. In other words what will interest us from here on will be to learn the lessons for the church which Parkin tries to teach for society. This must inevitably mean arguing, as he does, for the importance of opposition, and not just adaptation, to dominant forms of thought.

As we have seen earlier, the accusation of liberation theology is that European theology has become, in Pixley's words, "individualistic, spiritualizing and ahistorical." Any attempt to translate contextualized thinking to Scotland, therefore, must take seriously such an accusation and explore it honestly. Such an exploration must also examine the mechanisms whereby such a state of affairs continues in existence. That is what this chapter has been about. We have seen that there are many who wish to argue for the existence of alternative meaning systems, who see in the life of today's world not a series of homogeneous societies but rather societies where some groups dominate other groups and impose on them their view of the world and

of their own place in it. The mechanisms whereby such hegemony is maintained were identified as access to and control of the media and education as well as the arts. This also involves access to high office in almost any field of endeavour. What Parkin argued for was an understanding which did not preclude an individual from the subordinate class reaching high office but rather argued that such a journey would necessarily involve the adoption of the values of the dominant class. Our challenge is to see the same processes at work in the church and in the church's interpretation of the bible. If what was argued in chapter one is true - namely that Marshall et.al. are correct in deducing a continuing class base for British society - then we can assume that such thinking will find its reflection within the church. One of the bases for such an assumption is that the tendency of some to see the church as a self-contained community of belief is not borne out by the findings of this study. We should, therefore, summarize some of those findings before proceeding further.

The first and obvious point is that not everybody agreed on how the different passages from the bible should be interpreted. The second point is, however, not so obvious. Many within the church are quite happy with the idea of individual differences when it comes to biblical interpretation but are quite unwilling to accept that such differences should have any kind of group, never mind class, base. What was shown in the studies, though, was

that there were times when the different groups produced different communal interpretations. It should be remembered that this was a communal event, conducted with groups of people trying to come to some agreement between themselves on how a particular subject should be understood. It was thus very consciously an event of the church and it is the understanding (or understandings) of the church with which we are concerned. For example the reactions to the Magnificat in the sixth study were markedly different in the three groups who took part and even the recognition of the passage as being particularly important was variable.

There were, however, points of agreement (sometimes unexpected) which punctuated the discussions. The necessity of leadership from without for those who seek liberation was one such unexpected agreement, as was the interpretation of Jesus' saying that the poor are always with us - which was that giving to the church is now the equivalent of the jar of ointment being given to Jesus. The idea also arose that in our society today it is very difficult to see women as being oppressed. When however, in a subsequent discussion, we talked of the control of money and of violence within the home, the view of one group changed - perhaps the oppression of women by men was indeed still a reality. A further example of the same kind of point was found in study five where ideas of damnation were resisted by all involved, particularly eternal

damnation. Only the man whose memories of school and the eternal damnation of being put in a corner and forgotten about managed to bring some real understanding to the otherwise purely cerebral consideration of the subject. What such general similarities and particular differences begin to point to seems to be a situation described by Parkin where a dominant meaning system is challenged by particular and concrete experience. Others such as Elliott want also to say that minds are changed in action rather than in theory. This project was of course not able to initiate any particular action to test such a proposition but it is true to say that often the most telling contributions to discussion came from an insight gained in particular encounters.

Theodicy

It is, however, to theodicy that we must return in order to bring out the real differences between the different groups and, it would appear, between different classes. When faced with the problem of evil there appear to be three strategies open: the first is acceptance, the second is explanation, the third is opposition. These three are capable of being expressed in the terms of Parkin's categorization above - thus the dominant value system would produce acceptance, the subordinate value system would produce explanation, the radical value system would produce opposition. Of course to try to find real, uncomplicated examples of these ideal types would be a fruitless search.

We can, however, find instances which point us to a useful way forward. We can look particularly at study three where the subject of oppression was considered. There are three different points to be examined. Firstly, there is the role imputed by the different groups to fear; secondly, there is the relationship between oppression and poverty; and thirdly, there is the notion of oppression within the church.

Fear was related to oppression by reason of arguing that those with power over others use oppression because of fear of losing that power. This is not an argument which implies acceptance but certainly one which suggests that oppression can be explained. It is an argument which came from a group which might be most likely to produce acceptance in its discussions. However if we look more closely at the argument used in this discussion in two of the three groups we begin to see that there is in fact a substantial element of acceptance contained there. This is because the fear referred to was the fear of being oppressed in ones turn. The presumption seemed therefore to be that if one was not oppressing the likelihood was that one would be oppressed. Thus although fear was used to explain a particular oppression, oppression in general was being accepted (with Simone Weil) as "the very nature of things." By contrast, the third group saw fear as an unacceptable explanation for oppression and reckoned that if those in power had something to fear it was because they

had misused or abused that power. Oppression in this view became much more straightforward and uncomplicated - it was something simply to be opposed.

The relationship between oppression and poverty also produced an interesting area for analysis. Mention has been made of this earlier but new light can now be provided for this by way of Parkin's schema. That is because once we have seen oppression as being accepted or explained or opposed we are better placed to see poverty in the same terms. We saw how it was that only one group linked poverty and power but that all three linked power with oppression. We can see, therefore, that only the group with the greatest contact with poverty could see the link between that poverty and oppression. This same group was also that which saw opposition as the obvious answer to oppression and it is revealing that that opposition was expressed in an economic context - that of the social security office. We can perhaps take it from this that this group would see opposition as the obvious reaction also to poverty. Would it be fair, however, to infer from what was said by the other groups that they did not oppose poverty? I feel sure that they would be quite indignant at such a suggestion. That having been said, it does appear that we do need to assert such a state of affairs or something very near to it. Because once we have said that there is a link between poverty and oppression we must then go on to link how the two are viewed. If a group saw

oppression as being inevitable and therefore as something which had to be accepted, the same must be true of its view of poverty. Indeed, the enthusiastic quotation of the words of Jesus that the poor will always be with us is surely evidence of just such an attitude. Equally, if oppression is seen as something which, while not acceptable, can nevertheless be explained, the same will be true of poverty.

Thirdly, we come to oppression within the church. This thinking came out of one group only - the same group which opposed oppression and linked it with poverty. Another group acknowledged the existence of a class structure within the church but did not go on to acknowledge such a structure as oppressive. Where the link with oppression was made, it was made on the basis not of ontology but of hegemony. While one group was willing to see the existence of class it was not able to go on from there to look at the effect of such an existence on those at the receiving end of a dominant ideology. Where that extra step was taken a new way of looking at the organization and the ethos of the church and its way of running things was opened up. And in that opening there came into view a model which had grown out of the experience of one class being imposed as the norm of church life upon another. Here surely was hegemony at work - and if at work organizationally, can we be sure that it is not at work ideologically? The ideological work of hegemony is seen where its very existence is seen but

nevertheless accepted. Only when such a discussion opened up new avenues of understanding by asking church members to put their own particular experience into the melting pot was it possible for them to realize the oppression for what it was and to begin to suggest that it might be opposed.

Within the groups which took part in this study, therefore, we can see the elements of Parkin's outline of three meaning systems. Of course Parkin's original intention was to describe the different ways of understanding within the subordinate class. We, however, have used the same categories somewhat differently. They have become for us ways of understanding all the groups within the project - including the group which might most closely represent the dominant class if not within society then certainly within the church. We have seen also that the dominant meaning system in this context is one which is accepting of much which a radical meaning system would wish to oppose. Such opposition is, because of the nature of the hegemony which operates, more latent than actual. The community which Wilson regards as central to religion and as perhaps religion's continuing role within and gift to modern society is a community which is not at all homogeneous. It is not possible to see the church as a single entity operating within one plausibility structure. Rather, like the interpretations of society which see unitary goals and aspirations, an interpretation of the church which sees no division is one which takes the dominant value system

and interprets it as universality rather than as hegemony.

The importance suggested at the end of chapter one for power, class and local theology has been supported by a significant proportion of the discussions in the groups. The question now is, how is this to be put to use? In the concluding chapter, therefore, we will return to the argument between universal and local theology and argue the case for an understanding of mission which releases the latter to confront the divisions which the former tries to ignore. In other words, what will be sought is a way to overcome the hegemony of universal theology so that oppression and poverty and suffering can be seen to be neither acceptable nor explainable but to be opposed. Is it possible to find a method of mission whose aim is to take away the sins of the world?

> "Evangelization emerges from the encounter between the Christian message and the challenges of reality. Without this dialogue, evangelization is either the imposition of a message, or a religious alienation without roots in culture." (L. Boff, 1992, p.54.)

What has emerged from the work in this thesis is that it is possible to view the church as having its roots in one culture even when it is trying to operate in another. This ability rests on the power of one group or class to see the thinking which arises from within its own particular experience as being universally applicable. The effect of this, therefore, is to undervalue or even undermine the experience of other groups or classes. Such others are then left with two choices. These are:

(1) to accept that their experience is indeed inherently less valuable and adapt to the superior understanding being presented to them;

(2) to assert the importance of their own experience in opposition to such dominant theology.

Leonardo Boff, in Good News to the Poor, seeks to outline the principles of a 'new evangelization' in a context where the effects of the church's connection with colonialism, with power, with domination and with the imposition of a message are all too clear. He takes the results of theological reflection and Christian praxis in Latin America and develops from them a strategy for mission. It should be possible at this preliminary stage of the chapter, therefore, to glean from his analysis some of the

pointers which will be necessary for our conclusions here, to make the same shift from observation to application. It is therefore as application that these conclusions must be couched. They concern the mission of the church. If the argument concerning universal and local theology is to have any bearing on the church's life then it is in the realm of the church's mission that such a bearing must be found. It will be the purpose of this chapter, therefore, to develop the ideas around the second option above for those outwith a dominant group - to assert the importance of their own experience and the understanding which grows from that. Such an assertion will be local theology and mission for the church. In other words, we start to move at this point from analysis and into projections for policy.

One of the pointers which Boff indicates is the importance of an acknowledgement of a previous history of dependency (the result, we have discovered, of hegemony). This in its turn produces a need for action which will reverse that history - what Boff refers to as "a new radical practice of solidarity" (L.Boff, 1992, p.56). He outlines this practice by way of a series of 'options' which operate at different 'levels'. These are as follows:

- at the economic level there has to be an option for labour over capital;
- at the political level there has to be an option for widespread participation in democratic processes and public debate;
- at the symbolical level there needs to be an option for popular culture, thus: "a church will be popular to the extent that it permits the people to express themselves symbolically, in their own code, in their own ecclesial space;"

- at the ecclesial level there needs to be an option for 'community Christianity': "here faith is experienced as an impulse for the transformation of life ... the gospel meets the reality of injustice, and kindles a yearning for liberation;"
- the personal level must be expressed in a social context: "wherever we are, wherever we live and breathe, we must put the utopia of the new, experienced as leaven, into practice. This is a condition for projecting it on to the whole of society;"
- at the pedagogical level there must be an option for dialogue and synthesis, listening as well as speaking. (L.Boff, 1992, pp.56-59)

This of course is a distillation of much well-discussed liberationist thinking but its formulation here offers a framework within which we too can hope to advance. The categories of economic, political, symbolical, ecclesial, personal and pedagogical are useful also to the present purpose. It is interesting to note the order in which Boff presents them - starting with economics and politics and ending with the personal and the pedagogical, with symbol and church intervening. Such an order betrays in itself an understanding of evangelization which might not find universal favour. It is an order, however, which is put in its context by Boff when he writes: "What God wills and loves is not first and foremost the church, but a new society. The new church will be found within that society." (L.Boff, 1992, p.59) All this stems from the original 'option' which informs all the options listed above - the preferential option for the poor. It is an option which draws out what should be clear as soon as we start using such terms - that what we are engaged in here is making choices, that being 'for' can also be interpreted as being 'against'. Because of this, much of what we will

have to say about local theology will involve the kind of opposition implied by the second of the choices available to those who have a dominant theology provided for them by a culture which is other than that in which they live.

Before moving on to that, however, let us look at what Boff implies when he uses the term 'potentiation' in this context of mission. He uses it to describe the aim of mission but also to say something about what mission is not. It is not, on this account, an attempt to turn people into different people, to move them into a new culture. Rather it is to realize fully the humanity they already have. Boff bases this on the christology of Chalcedon. He argues that if we hold that the human and the divine were in Christ without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, then we cannot hold that there is only one cultural ethos within which one can properly express a Christian faith or lifestyle. Christ, in his person, was the true incarnation of missionary method - he became completely at one with those to whom he had been sent yet without losing the identity of the one who had sent him. So when we engage in missionary activity we must always remember this - what we offer is not a particular way of organizing society or even a particular moral code:

> "In the light of the mystery of the Incarnation, we can say: it is possible for culture to maintain its full identity, and still incorporate the Christian mystery, without separation and without confusion. In other words: each people ought to be able to be the people of God without having to pass through the

> mediation of the people who first recognized that it was loved by God, and thereby was constituted people of God, the Jewish and Christian people." (L.Boff, 1992, p.73)

Potentiation is about the ability to be fully human in whatever society or culture one already inhabits. This means taking seriously the hopes of those in any sector of society, particularly the hopes of the poor. Such a move will always produce problems because the hopes of the poor, if they are to be realized, may well impinge upon the rich and on the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed.

Boff uses Jesus' evangelical method to take this notion further. He sees Jesus as combining two things - message and signs. Both, he says, are essential. The message cannot be left on its own or it will be pure theory. The signs cannot be separated from the message or they become, "a system of assistance to human needs," (L.Boff, 1992, p.75). Put together, however, signs become a foretaste of the kingdom because the signs have a message attached to them, an explanation of their meaning which allows other action to flow and initiating a new dialectic of understanding and action which carries mission forever forward. The signs, however, must be specific. There must be real healing of real wounds. Signs must be of historical significance:

> "An evangelization that makes no effort to deliver the victims of the agonies of history (produced by structural, voluntary distortions), that fails to humanize existence, that fails to reduce the pain of life through the creation of a community of sisters

> and brothers (a messianic community), will have difficulty claiming to be in the tradition of Jesus." (L.Boff, 1992, p.76)

In other words, the mission of the church must address real people and their problems and hopes. It must do so on the terms of those people and in terms which allow them to develop their own account of sign and message, to develop their own dialectic, to produce a local theology which involves taking crucified people down from the cross. Boff warns against well-meaning paternalism and the power of dominant groups:

> "There are subtle ways of perpetuating the strategy of power as a tool in the propagation of the gospel: new movements of the dominant classes, new social subjects, transnationalized, reproducers of the system of domination and marginalization of the great majorities ... They may do a great deal <u>for</u> the people and <u>for</u> the poor, but they never do it <u>with</u> the people and together <u>with</u> the poor, from the viewpoint of the poor. They end by eternalizing relations of dependency, and preventing the impoverished from becoming the subjects, the agents, of their own history." (L.Boff, 1992, p.80)

This is the lesson which has been taught by development agencies, whether to do with world poverty or community development in our own land and in that sense there is nothing new in what Boff has to say. It has been a lesson hard for the church to learn, however, and I want now to explore a little the reasons for that - why it is that we can say that the church (and here it is the Church of Scotland to which I am referring) has so often been seen to be unable to set in motion the kind of dialectic between sign and message to which Boff points. (We shall return to Boff later in the chapter.)

John Harvey (1987) writes of various attempts to bridge the gap between the church and the poor. He surveys the traditional efforts of parish missions carried out by Thomas Chalmers, George Macleod and Tom Allan (all in Glasgow) and Cyril Garbett (in Portsea). He has serious criticisms of them all, mostly because they all tried to do the old things better rather than try to do anything new. The problem with doing the old things better was that the old things presume that the aim of mission is to bring people (in this case the poor) in to the church - and that the poor are just waiting to be brought in if only the right way of reaching them can be found. Harvey suggests that this is somewhat removed from reality. The idea that mission is a matter of the institutional church reaching out and drawing people in is, he suggests, not on the agenda. Most in the church even today, however, would be surprised to hear that, for that is exactly their idea of what mission is. Harvey wants to say that such missionary activity starts from the wrong end - from the church rather than from the poor.

He therefore examines three attempts at starting from the other end, from the poor. The first is the worker-priest movement in Germany and France, the second is the East Harlem Protestant Parish and the third is the Gorbals Group ministry. He spends most time, speaking as he is to a Scottish audience, on the Gorbals Group, using the other two as 'lead-ins' to that discussion and as illumination

for it. It may be as well for us to concentrate similarly on the Scottish experience. The first point to make about his account of this 'exploration' is the reluctance of Glasgow Presbytery to approve it and then to countenance its departure from normal church practice - for example its lack of a service on a Sunday and its normative use of the Lord's Supper in those services it did hold. More central to the project in which the group was involved, however, is the criticism that it was failing to involve local people in its work - surely vital if the exploration was to have any validity whatsoever. It overcame this by becoming what one observer described as a 'diakonia' group:

> "less and less concerned with internal relationships, and with any attempts at the formation of little congregations in the area, and more and more committed to seeking to meet the needs of the area and its hard-pressed people." (Harvey, 1987, p.105)

Harvey quotes Geoff Shaw, like Harvey himself a member of the group, as writing that such involvement was in order to be able to intercede for the community from the basis of personal knowledge and to be able to express the healing ministry of Christ in attempts to heal the brokenness of the community. There is a danger here, however, that what Boff sees as the indissoluble link between sign and message will be lost and the sign will remain uninterpreted. An American who worked with the group for some time asked:

> "In what way can we really say that the church is present when social work alone is accomplished? Does it really matter that Christian work be a conscious thing both with the doer and the receiver? And how, in this situation, can the receivers also become the doers in the fullest sense of the word?" (Harvey, 1987, p.108)

At the end of the day, then, was the Gorbals Group ministry really that different? Was it not still the sending of missionaries into a mission field in much the same way that missionaries were sent into the colonies? Shaw had tried to discuss just such a danger in a 1968 report - the danger of cultural intrusion:

> "local people felt 'strange' in what was, essentially, a very middle-class, wordy, and activist group of outsiders who would always remain outsiders however much they sought to 'participate' in (as against 'identify with') the life of the area." (Harvey, 1987, p.106)

Might it be that the point of the present thesis is very much to the point when considering such an exploration - that the possibility that there might be an alternative hermeneutic at work was not considered, or at least not acted upon. The middle-class, wordy, activist nature of the group meant that this group had brought its own interpretative skills to bear and was no more ready than had been Chalmers or Macleod before them to hear in a way which would challenge them to rework what Shaw describes as 'basic faith'.

What, then, were the systems of domination and of power which were at work here? It would seem that those with whom the group sought to work were at the very least suspicious whenever an attempt was made to add the message to the signs. As soon as worship, in whatever form, was attempted old divisions endemic in the area were brought to the fore and an invasion of accepted patterns of life was perceived:

> "We tried Sunday services ... none of our neighbours came, partly because as soon as the flag marked 'worship' was raised, the denominational standard was automatically seen to be flying above it, and partly because they were in their beds anyway." (Harvey, 1987, p.107)

There was, in other words, a whole history of what the church was perceived to be against which the group found it virtually impossible to fight. There was a dominant ideology embedded in the culture which would have required much more time than was allowed to be eroded. Was there, for example, the feeling abroad that what was being offered here was no more than a Trojan horse to try to 'save' people for the 'real' church? Was there a failure to address issues of power? Might it have helped to have constantly before them the 'options' suggested by Boff? While the group might claim to have exercised correctly the first two options (for labour over capital and in favour of political participation), what about the third? Boff suggests that the church must make "an unequivocal option for popular culture" (Boff, 1992, p.57) and the question must be asked about how the culture of the group was seen by those among whom it sought to grow roots. It might be that the group was not unequivocal enough about what Boff insists is unavoidable - that the new church will appear in the new society. Was there an attempt, perhaps in response to 'official' pressure, to bring into being the new church in advance of the new society?

It is, of course, far too easy to ask these kind of questions from a safe distance; far more difficult, even

when the questions are acknowledged, to find solutions. Harvey goes on, however, to talk himself of the challenge emanating from Latin America and to suggest possibilities for the future. He pleads for more explorations of the kind which he has previously described - and not so that the church can learn to do the old things better. He is still arguing for a new thing to be done, that the church should not learn how better to reach out to the poor or be a better church for the poor, but should become the church of the poor. When the Church of England spoke of the problems faced by those living in Urban Priority Areas it spoke of the hope of a new theology coming out of these areas which would enable the church to mount a more effective critique of contemporary society. Harvey, however, still believes that the commission which produced the report, "cannot see a church <u>of</u> the poor, as distinct from a church <u>for</u> the poor, emerging in England," (Harvey, 1987, p.115). This, he believes, is a profound mistake. He goes on to point to the new things which might come from a church of the poor - lessons on what it is to be truly human, about community and solidarity, about the nature and exercise of power. And his conclusions thus begin to match the conclusions arising from the studies which form the backbone of this thesis - that it those nearest power from the receiving end who best understand it.

The question then arises of how best to assist this development to take place, to allow this understanding to

It was seen earlier that the ideas which come under the general title of 'liberation theology' were more easily accepted by some in the church than by others. We saw also that it was those who were nearest to the poor who had such acceptance open to them. What has been argued since has been that such understanding has the potential to be of benefit to the whole church. It can, at the very least, be seen as a much needed corrective to the swing of the pendulum toward an individualistic religion which is dehistoricized. In order, however, for such thinking truly to take root in the church in Scotland it needs to find suitable soil and appropriate growing conditions. Such conditions, I have argued, are not universally available. The theology of which we speak here must be developed as local theology . It must be allowed to be incarnated in scandalous particularity and permitted to achieve there its full potential. Harvey recognizes, as must we, that such localism will generate much that is untidy and unfamiliar:

> "One has to pose the ultimate question: can the church allow such an exercise, and not just allow it but even encourage it, even if it produces confusion and failure and conflict, and disturbs the peace of the church - or even if it actually begins to replace the church as we have known it for so long?" (Harvey, 1987, p.123f.)

When, however, phrases such as 'the peace of the church' begin to be heard, we need to be on our guard. What Segundo and Gramsci and Parkin, indeed many others also, have told us is to be wary of such phrases. Always we must ask about whose interests are being served by such ways of speaking. If we see widespread agreement, is that because

such agreement has been reached by all those involved or is it because agreement has been imposed? The results of the research in this study must lead us to the suspicion that in the church, in Scotland as anywhere else, wide agreement is most likely to be the result of some voices remaining unheard. We cannot afford the Parsonian approach to common sense and common values - rather we must always ask: common to whom and valuable to whom?

Clodovis Boff, in Gibellini (1987), is asked to discuss the problems caused to the Roman Catholic hierarchy by the book Church: Charism and Power (1985) written by his brother, Leonardo. He answers by saying that the book put in question the global structure of the church - thus being a challenge to the hierarchy. The book argues that a church cannot be both liberative and authoritarian (in the terms used earlier, the sign and the message must fit together); it also argues that universal theology is impossible. In Clodovis Boff's words, the criticisms directed from without at liberation theology are, "abstract, doctrinaire and deductive," (Gibellini, 1987, p.93). In his book, Leonardo Boff discusses the characteristics of a new church - the result of the ecclesiogenesis which he has been describing. By looking at these characteristics as Boff describes them we can perhaps see both what it was which worried the hierarchy of his church and also what it is in this mode of understanding which worries many within our own church. This, therefore, begins to show what lay behind the options

discussed earlier, adds to the call expressed by Harvey for space to be made for alternatives, and lays the basis for the local theology advocated in this thesis.

The first of the characteristics to which Boff refers is that of the new church as the people of God. (It may be worth pointing out here that Boff (1985, p.116) does indeed refer to the birth of a new church though Kee (1990, p.213) claims that what is being described is not a new church but rather a renewed church.) It is this first point which really sets the tone and refers to the choice for a dominated class referred to above. Boff interprets 'people' with the connotations of the Spanish 'puebla'. The essential point of such an interpretation is its oppositional stance. The people of God are seen as a people in opposition to some other group and are constituted in action against such others. (This opposition and forging in action is what John Vincent also affirms in Stirrings (1976), edited by Vincent himself. He argues that there is no place for peacemakers who only cloud the issue and end up by protecting those referred to by Boff as 'others'.) Just who these others may be can be discerned from the characteristics which follow.

The second characteristic of the new church is that it is poor and weak, the third is that it is of the dispossessed, the fourth is that it is of the laity. We can therefore begin to see that those who this people of God are against

are those who are not poor or weak, who are not of the dispossessed, and who are not of the laity. Thus Boff's schema is concerned not only with opposition but also with an analysis of power. Such an analysis is not usually thought of as desirable in the church and we saw clearly that most participants in the studies were not able to provide any clear idea about power (this being particularly apparent in the pilot group which discussed the first study). We saw as well that those with power, or at least who are nearer to the centre of circles of influence, are less aware of it than are those who are at the edge and on the receiving end of power's effects. There will, therefore, be many who will see such an analysis as being unnecessarily provocative and divisive, being relatively unaware of power's operation. What Boff is setting out for us here, however, is that division already exists, that unity is only apparent because of the cloaking device which is provided by dominant ideology and hegemony (though surprisingly neither he, nor indeed Kee, discuss hegemony at all).

This discussion of power continues in the next three characteristics - the church should be one which is a koinonia, a sharing, of power; it should be one which shares the tasks of ministry; it should be of the diaspora - that is, beyond the pale of institutional Christianity. Behind these three is a clear view not only of the new church but also of the old one. That view is that within

institutional Christianity there is a concentration of power in the hands of those who bear the official title of 'minister'. The question we in Scotland and in the Church of Scotland need to ask ourselves is how true that picture is of us and ours. We may like to think that Boff's picture is of a highly hierarchical and centralized Roman Catholic Church but we must admit that the picture fits rather too well in our own situation.

The eighth characterisitic is that the church should be a liberator church; the ninth that it should be one which sacramentalizes present liberations. Although we are actually only half way through Boff's list, he is already starting to repeat himself. The church as people of God, we have already heard, is formed and defined in action against others - but in the same way that we said earlier that being for will inevitably mean being against, the opposite is true: if the church is thus formed and defined against others, it will just as inevitably be for those who are without power - who are poor and weak and dispossessed. It is possible, indeed unavoidable, to be 'for' at the same time as one is 'of'. Thus the action which forms and defines the people of God is liberative action. Then the church is called to celebrate before God the liberation which has occurred. This celebration need not be, perhaps should not be, of any traditional church mould for worship. Boff himself, we noted in his later work, affirmed the value and place of popular culture. Here he puts it thus:

the church, "liturgizes the popular, and popularizes the liturgical," (L.Boff, 1985, p.120).

Boff, in his remaining list of characteristics, sets what he has already laid out in the context of church tradition and starts to use the language of the traditional church. The new church, he says, is in the grand tradition of Jesus and the apostles who were poor and recognized the evangelical potential of poverty. (John Harvey (1987, p.110) pointed out the importance of Jesus' commissioning statement: "Take nothing with you for the journey: no stick, no beggar's bag, no food, no money, not even an extra shirt. Wherever you are welcomed, stay in the same house until you leave that town; wherever people don't welcome you, leave that town and shake the dust off your feet as a warning to them.") This tradition, Boff says, has always existed but its story is hardly ever told. Such a mission will put the church of which he speaks in communion with the church at large and will foster unity in its mission of liberation. This will lead to a new expression of catholicity as a universal vocation for justice, rights and participation. Such universality comes from a starting point with the poor and the weak and the marginalized and the dispossessed. And since an apostle is one who is sent, the sending of this new church with its shared ministry and power is thoroughly apostolic. It is also striving for a new type of holiness - that of the militant.

Although much of what Boff says here is a repetition of the basic points he was making earlier in the list, the repetition is now couched in terms the traditional church ought to understand - although whether his use of the terms is understandable to such an institution may be debatable. It is clear, therefore, that he is addressing himself to the institutional church, making a plea for understanding, for acceptance, for space and perhaps for kenosis. It is the same plea made by Martin Luther King and by John Harvey. It is the plea that any church structure which exists outside the conventional or the institutional must make. Such a plea must be made because what is being presented is not the finished article but the beginnings of a search:

> "Faith ... is the ferment of indefatigable hope and love, supporting the strength of the weak and the certainty of the search for justice and fraternity," (L.Boff, 1985, p.124)

Not everyone who is involved in the mission of the church, of course, would regard it as a search. Bruce Nicholls (1979) argues that all those involved in contextual theology must accept what he describes as the givenness of biblical theology. The experience which is relevant here, he says, is experience within the community of faith or, in his words, within the circle of faith commitment. The process of theologizing is a one-way street where theology judges culture and not vice versa. It is a theme taken up by John Stott (1992). Stott argues that evangelism and social action cannot be divorced - they are not only to exist side by side, they must be related. "Words without

works lack credibility; works without words lack clarity," (Stott, 1992, p.345). Here there are definite echoes of Boff's sign and message methodology and there are more echoes of Boff when Stott goes on to argue that the incarnation provides us with a model for mission which involves cultural identification without loss of identity. Stott wants, however, to avoid the accusation that what he is suggesting is liberation theology:

> "our main evangelical critique of liberation theology is that it attempts to equate the social, political and economic liberation of human beings with the 'salvation' which Christ came, died and rose to win," (Stott, 1992, p.351).

Even more basic a difference, however, is the attitude to those being evangelized. Stott quotes with approval John V. Taylor when he says, "some of us must take the trouble to cross over and learn to be at home in that alien territory," (Stott, 1992, p.359). Stott goes on:

> "We should, I believe, be praying and working for a whole new generation of Christian thinkers and apologists who will dedicate their God-given minds to Christ, enter sympathetically into their contemporaries' dilemmas, unmask false ideologies, and present the gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that he is seen to offer what other religious systems cannot, because he and he alone can fulfil our deepest human aspirations," (Stott, 1992, p.359f.).

There is no search here for new ways of being the church but rather an announcement of what the church is. This is Nicholls' one-way street where the evangelizer gives and the evangelized receive.

There is a second difference, however, and that is the order of things. Liberation theology places theology very

firmly as the second act - a reflection on action. For Stott theology comes first: "I make no apology for beginning with theology," (Stott, 1992, p.242). In this way of thinking one first must get one's theology right before any action can be deemed appropriate. Stott argues that if we do not do this we are likely to be sucked in to the spirit of the age - as the German churches were with Nazism. He seems, however, not to distinguish between being sucked in to a dominant and oppressive ideology and cooperating with a revolutionary ideology. In other words, Stott like so many others has not analyzed power and its influence - his only references to power being in relation to the Holy Spirit and the power it has to compensate for our weakness. The importance in all this is that Stott and Nicholls are not at all in the business of local theology. There is, for them as for the hierarchy against which Boff struggles, a universal theology which can be translated into any set of circumstances.

If we are to move forward, then, in our search for local theology - and this thesis has sought to show that a starting point for this is the discovery of particularized biblical interpretation, we must turn to the one whose educational theories have provided much of the impetus to liberationism - Paolo Freire. We will ask of him what we might do to develop local theology in the light of what has appeared so far in this chapter and in the light of the material in the research project for this thesis. Freire

(1972) tackles the same fatalism which was mentioned by Marshall et.al.. He too sees fatalism as a result of the social situation in which people find themselves. It is a sociological phenomenon rather than a psychological one - perhaps even an ideological phenomenon. Freire suggests that fatalism disguised as docility arises from alienation. This alienation is from potential. Those who are oppressed come to believe that their position is due to their lack. This produces the aspiration of which Parkin wrote which comes from believing that the road to realization of potential or even to full humanity involves becoming like the oppressor or even one of the oppressors. The reply to such thinking, according to Freire, is to investigate the people's universe and re-present it to them as a problem. The task is to involve people in looking at their situation and in discovering the roots of and the remedies to it.

Three debates arise from this: the first debate is one which was raised in the study project - the question of leadership; the second debate is about whether we are dealing with integration or with transformation; and the third debate is, in church terms, about whether the mission of the church concerns people or themes.

Leadership:

It will be recalled that the issue of leadership arose in discussions of both study three (oppression) and study four (liberation). In study three such discussion arose in

response to Cosmas Desmond who suggested that only the oppressed could interpret the bible. He, in other words, was assigning a leadership role to the oppressed - a role which is indicated by the liberationist theme of the epistemological privilege of the poor. One church saw that as meaning that the poor are God's messengers to the oppressed but, along with the other participants, this idea changed when study four was reached. There we identified a common thread with regard to liberation - that the oppressed cannot liberate themselves. It was taken by all as a fact of life, not to be denied or diminished, that there is a need for a catalyst from outside the situation (as defined by Lenin or personified by Moses) who will become the moving force toward liberation. Freire, too, seems to lean toward this view. The very fact that he is talking in terms of pedagogy points us to this conclusion. The role, mentioned above, of presenting back to people as a problem what they themselves have already described, is a role which is that of a catalyst, someone in but not of the situation. Freire affirms that the oppressed can indeed free their oppressors and would perhaps find common cause with Cosmas Desmond in the leadership role which he gives to the oppressed. But it would seem that their ability to function in that role depends, in Freire's view, on pedagogy. This is because liberation, unlike domination, requires volition. Therefore the oppressed must be stirred into action. The question is: to what end?

Integration or transformation?

This question is the one addressed by Boff above. It is the question which asks about the content of liberation - is its purpose to change oppressed people into something else (so that they may fit more easily into the dominant mode of society) or is it to make them more fully what they are (and thus alter society to fit more easily with them)? Freire argues that liberation education has as its task the affirmation of people as beings in the making. This task is accomplished by drawing out with them the limits to their existence and analyzing what can be done to change those limits. It is at the limits that the true nature of a society is revealed - change the limits and the society itself will be changed. We are here, of course, back in the arena of power. Different groups in society will experience different limit situations, indeed not only the nature but the frequency of contact will vary. The factor behind this variance is possession of or access to power. Perhaps the more obvious way of making the same point is to say that the less power one has, the more powerless one is, the more quickly and the more often will one find oneself limited by outside agencies or forces. Thus to enable people to confront limit situations is to enable them to understand the nature of their powerlessness and also to reveal the nature of the structures which make up the society.

Again, when we look back to the studies, we find power

being understood differently by different groups and we can now perhaps see the reasons for that difference. The reasons are wrapped up in the proximity of limit situations. So when one group puts their understanding of power in tandem with its understanding of poverty, it is because that group has seen the limits which lack of financial resources imposes and has seen those limits as an expression not only of powerlessness but also as an expression of power pressing in from outside - and thus as an expression of oppression. The purpose of this examination of limit situations, then, is not the integration of an individual into the society as it is already constituted but rather the transformation of the society - at the very least, a transformation of how that society is viewed. Such a choice was faced by the groups in study two (suffering) when they were asked to look at Max Peberdy's parable. There they faced a limit situation of their own - a limit, perhaps, at which their reasoning powers broke down. The choice, however, was one between integration of an individual (first-aid) or transformation of the whole system (changes within the factory). The inability of most participants to reason their way to a choice between the two was due to the limits they saw in the system itself - in this case they believed that the system could not be transformed without collapsing entirely. It would reach its own limit and so would the individuals involved because there would be no reasonable existence outside the system. Can the mission of the

church be to bring about such destruction? What if the temple cannot be rebuilt in three days?

The final point about limit situations is that people do not like living close to them. They prefer to stay well within the bounds so that they do not notice any more than is absolutely necessary the confining walls of their existence. Limit situations are painful. So when we are discussing suffering we must be aware that to bring it to the surface in order to oppose it is not an easy thing to do. To make people aware of their chains is not always going to win friends or admirers. Is it the mission of the church to accentuate suffering, to hoist it up for all to see - thorns and nails and all?

People or themes?

Freire's final point for us here is his emphasis that investigation into the life of a community is not into people but into themes. This is because an investigation into people makes those people into objects whereas an investigation of themes enables the people to act as subjects. What are the themes which run through the life of the community? What makes it function? What do people regard as important? It is through this process that the re-presentation mentioned above is enabled to take place. It is, however, a somewhat unusual emphasis for the mission of the church which, even in its liberal incarnations, is wont to emphasise the importance of individual people in

the eyes of God and the value attached to each human life. To shift the emphasis to themes is, surely, to depersonalize mission and to lose any hold on the gospel. Here we meet the single most divisive issue for evangelism today - one with which we must come to terms. That is the issue of whether evangelism is aimed at individuals or at communities. Leonardo Boff was in this same area when he insisted on the personal being expressed in social terms. In the first chapter of this thesis the question was posed about whether our basic humanity was contained in our individual or our social being - because where our basic humanity is, there will our greatest oppression be also.

When the groups discussed Pixley's comments in study four (liberation), none of them were able fully to accept the idea of salvation being a communal event. The theme of the Exodus however, which formed the starting point for that discussion ought to have allowed just such an idea - the Exodus being seen as salvation for a nation, indeed for all who were willing to join the journey for whatever reason. For Freire it is important when working with a community not to make the members of that community feel that they are under scrutiny. They are not objects of investigation but subjects of transformation. The mission of the church will always need to bear in mind this distinction. For much evangelism, as set out by John Stott, the theme is salvation. For Freire, however, there is a question which must come alongside that - what are the themes of

salvation? As soon as that question is asked we are on the road to local theology. That is because once the universal theme of salvation is itself subdefined the subdefinitions will only make sense locally. Each community must define its own pain and its own strategies for defeating such pain. To accept that only a universally defined idea of salvation is adequate to the task is to cede power in this area to those who already hold it in relation to other areas, particularly in the area of ideas.

We can explore this further by looking at an attempt in the United States to develop a pedagogy for the non-poor - with the assistance of Paolo Freire. In Pedagogies for the Non-Poor, Alice Frazer Evans et.al. (1987) attempt to use the kind of work established by Freire - but with the middle class of North America. It is an attempt to make the non-poor see through the eyes of the poor, an attempt to take those who are used to being the definers and let them see through the sights of other definitions. For present purposes, it also allows us to reaffirm that what is being proposed in this thesis is not the abandonment of the middle class. The book is in part a report of courses organized with such people to try to achieve just such an aim (involving lectures, visits, stories). It thus treads some of the ground covered by the discussions in study five (justice). There we looked at different responses to the idea that Christ could be met in the victim. The debate at that time was between those who thought that we could

proceed on the basis of theoretical knowledge and those who thought that knowledge and understanding based on direct experience was absolutely vital. In the book by Evans et.al. the importance of stories is emphasised - stories delivered by those whose stories they were, if possible in the location where the stories were set. The point is made, however, that stories are of no use without decision. The point is made by the same writer that salvation, if viewed individualistically, undermines the whole project. Thus the contention is that both the stories and the decision they hope to inspire need to be communal. This is a big step. If the oppressed cannot free themselves, the non-poor cannot educate themselves. They need, we are told, to be brought out of their ideological cocoon which protects them and led into a world of risk.

When Freire is brought in to comment on what is being done, he wants to insist on the importance of what has been stressed throughout this thesis - power and class. Unless understanding of these topics is built, little progress can be anticipated. The results of the research project reported on earlier could hardly agree more. While agreement could be reached on many things (not all of them foreseen), what remained as a division was the importance of power and class. So it was that when we came to the discussion on what knowledge was appropriate, the belief among the educated middle class was that knowledge of victims could be learnt as one learns mathematical formulae

- given enough accurate information one could assimilate it and produce a reasoned response to it, even adapt one's lifestyle accordingly if need be. Among those who approached the matter from the other end, no amount of theoretical knowledge could make up for a lack of personal and experiential knowledge - only in direct contact was it possible to meet the victim in any meaningful way. When added to the comments above this seems to imply that the poor recognize that it is only in the specific that dominant ideology can be challenged - the level of theoretical knowledge is the level where dominant ideology rules. At the end of the day, therefore, this is where John Milbank's argument must fall - and it is over his idea of the church. A church at peace within itself would seem to be his ideal - but it is peace bought at a price. The price is the silence of those who need to be heard. The price is a covering over of all the things which Segundo urged us to uncover - the covering over, in particular of a process of domination which requires the active assent of no-one for it to continue. Challenges come in the specific and the particular and they are challenges which, for the health of the church, need to be faced for forgiveness and justice and repentance must somehow be related.

This moves us, then, to the point where we see the point about the epistemological privilege of the poor in relation to the mission of the church. In local theology the particular and the experiential come into their own. They

do so in a way which allows not only those whose experience is directly concerned to make sense of that experience but also in a way which allows that experience to be communicated to others. That communication must come in the form of a call to movement, to commitment, to decision. And because the experience which is the content of that call is communal, the decision is also expected to be communal. Freire recognized this when he said that such risk-taking on the part of the non-poor had to be done in community - Evans et.al. see that community as being a church congregation. They see such a development as leading to a counter culture within the church and among the non-poor where learning, activity and worship are linked. In other words, they are suggesting a modus vivendi for the church not unlike that of the early church in the empire of Rome. Such an eventuality would begin to produce the dialectic between sign and message which, at the beginning of this chapter, we found Leonardo Boff urging on us. It would also be the kind of development for which Harvey was pleading - one where parallel church structures, even of a purely experimental kind, were given room to grow and flourish. And it is based on the experience of the poor.

Basing so much on the experience of the poor is seen as dangerous by many. Basing theology and church life on temporal affliction, as we saw in the study project, can lead to problems of verifiability. We noticed how those

who were not poor were extremely wary of any coincidence of Christian hope with material improvement or social justice or release from suffering. Taking away the sins of the world as a criterion of the reliability of Christianity was seen as being so dangerous precisely because it produced unrealizable hopes. Wolfhart Pannenberg, in Christianity in a Secularized World (1989), makes this very point when he criticizes liberation theology on two particular grounds: firstly, that it presumes human and societal progress in a quite naive way; secondly, that it substitutes historical hope for eschatalogical hope. We find some answers to this type of criticism in a book entitled, What are they saying about social sin? (1990) by Mark O'Keefe. O'Keefe argues that we must be realistic about the world in which we live: "structures may be transformed but the attitudes and worldviews, the ideologies and blindnesses, which produced them would still remain," (O'Keefe, 1990, p.93). He also argues, however, that social sin requires of the church a strategy for social conversion which is aimed at social redemption. His recipe for such conversion involves the preferential option for the poor (of which we have spoken so much in the present work), conscientization, social analysis, group and community action, and also political action. He sees this conversion as a task for more than just the church but he also sees the church as having a special role within it, this being to provide symbolic witness (the liturgical role of which Boff spoke), political action and a prophetic

word. This last, he says, is only possible because of the biblical eschatological vision of the church. In other words, his reply to Pannenberg would be that historical hope is only available through eschatological hope - to oppose them, as Pannenberg does, is to set up an entirely false dichotomy. And we can add, from the perspective which has been set out above, that those who understand this hope best are those who are most in need of it - the poor of any society. The whole point about the kind of counter culture which Evans et.al. indicate is that it is set up among the non-poor on the basis of understanding originating in the experience and local theology of the poor. Such understanding seems to include a communal understanding of salvation and a hope which is incarnational and historical.

All this returns us to the question of the encouragement of local theology. Those who oppose the translocation of liberation theology from Latin America to Europe argue that the poor in Latin America are already Christian - their ways of thinking are open to this kind of approach. The same, it is said, is not true of Europe. In Scotland the very fact of the well-documented decline of the church among the poor (if it ever had a healthy position from which to decline) shows that the church is not in a position simply to allow the poor to develop their own church structures, far less their own theology. The whole of John Harvey's book bears eloquent witness to the

position of the poor vis-a-vis the church. His experience in the Gorbals shows that sign and message were not allowed to come together in the creative way which Boff presumes to be possible. None of what has been said so far, however, would indicate a pure laissez-faire approach. Certainly Paolo Freire does not advocate such a way of operating and Mark O'Keefe too suggests that our realistic approach to the world in which we live must include a role for instigators. He tells (O'Keefe, 1990, p.94) us that Segundo argues that there must first be personal conversion for some who will then work for social conversion which will, in turn, convert others. O'Keefe also refers to Moltmann who talks of the idealist illusion of personal transformation without social transformation and the materialist illusion of social transformation without personal transformation - the two must always go together. O'Keefe leaves us somewhat up in the air by suggesting that it is a matter of judgement about where to start.

There has been mentioned earlier, however, a term which should take us forward here. Antonio Gramsci talks of 'organic intellectuals', a term taken up by Gustavo Gutierrez in A Theology of Liberation (1974). We are, in effect, back to our earlier discussion of Lenin and Moses. Gutierrez quotes Cullmann on the role of the prophet:

> "The prophet does not limit himself as does the fortune-teller to isolated revelations, but his prophecy becomes preaching, proclamation. He explains to the people the true meaning of all events; he informs them of the plan and will of God at the particular moment." (Gutierrez, 1974, p.13)

Thus defined, the prophet seems very much like Lenin's tribune of the people as discussed in relation to study four. Both the prophet and the tribune of the people, therefore, seem to be included in this idea of an organic intellectual. In a book which is aimed at situations much nearer to home (from experience in England), Laurie Green (1990) talks of 'people's theologians'. He lists attributes which must be part of such theologians' make-up:

- they must be members of the community;
- they must be acceptable to local groups;
- they must be soaked in the tradition;
- they must be animators (with group and adult education skills);
- they must be level-headed (to guard against such things as over-emotional responses);
- they must have integrity among the poor;
- they must be able to affirm the theological responsibilities and abilities of the groups, (Green, 1990, p.124f.).

This list does indeed look very like Gramsci's organic intellectual. Such an impression is further strengthened when we look at what Green describes as his theological 'tent pegs'. There are six of these:

- that salvation includes liberation;
- that all theology has context;
- that theology should include action;
- that the question of power is crucial;

- that God has a special concern for the oppressed;

- that a witnessing spirituality must be maintained.

Having reached this point of affirming the need for people's theologians or organic intellectuals, perhaps we can move toward a conclusion by examining Green's six 'tent pegs' in the light of the content of this thesis.

Salvation includes liberation:

Green uses this to emphasise the communal nature of salvation but contained here also is the other fundamental division which was spoken of earlier - between taking on the sins of the world and taking away the sins of the world. The structural aspects of salvation of which Green speaks (and which O'Keefe addresses above) imply that there are sins of the world which can indeed be taken away. Green speaks of such liberation in terms of the reign of God and we are back at the debate between eschatological and historical hope. We saw in the studies that it was those whose lives were lived nearest to those in need of liberation who were best able to translate eschatology into history.

All theology has context:

Green bases his method on what he describes as the pastoral cycle of experience, exploration, reflection, response - and our findings must surely support this starting point in experience for only with appropriate experience can come appropriate subsequent steps. The claim that the context

for theology is experience, however, can be differently interpreted. The question is one of which experience is relevant to the enterprise. Many would be happy to allow a context of individual experience while entirely unhappy to allow the experience of social class as being in any way determinative. Green is aware of the global problems caused by Europeans foisting on other cultures their own style of worship and their own modes of understanding. He is also aware, however, of the dangers of the middle class in Britain foisting on working class people a mode of understanding which is quite alien. We found at several points the differences of opinion to be capable of explanation in class experience terms, not least of which was the very idea of class as being anyone's context "anymore".

Theology includes action:

None of the participants in the studies would have dissented from this statement. Where they began to demur, however, was at the point at which it was suggested that action was what led to theology rather than the other way around. I suspect that Green too is saying that theology leads to action. Liberation theology, however, sees theology as the second step; the first is liberative action - which is then the object of reflection. (Severino Croatto, in Fabella and Torres (1983), writes that the word of God is about the events of God - we cannot allow ourselves to be left with word but no event.) By the very

fact that Green uses the word 'cycle' to describe his method, though, he is also allowing for the response to become part of the experience which is then explored and reflected upon. His is a new version of the hermeneutical circle. In order, however, to begin to approach the hermeneutical circle favoured by Segundo the element of suspicion must be added. It is this element which moves us to the idea that the action which is part of theology might be action of opposition - the kind of focussed acts of love of which Segundo also spoke. Such acts were regarded by one of the groups in the study as worthy of contemplation - part, as it was put, of the struggle to save history. The suspicion which lies at the heart of such action, however, is brought to the fore by the subject of power.

The question of power is crucial:

Green's approach to this puts theology first. He sees power as emanating from God and therefore as defined by God and, in particular, as defined by God's loving willingness to make himself vulnerable. Our research, however, has shown that power must be approached in a much more critical way - because it is such a critical issue. Green uses his discussion to argue the point that people should be empowered by not being dependent on 'professionals' - which in itself is a fair enough point. What was demonstrated, though, in the chapter on dominant ideology and meaning systems was that power is pervasive. It controls the way people react; it governs the options which they see as

being open to them; it tells those who are not of the educated middle class that their experience and their interpretation of that experience are not as valuable as the experience and the interpretation of others. Thus there were times in the study groups where ideas were shared which did not fit with other responses in some places. The ability of some groups within the church to place their interpretation into the minds of other social groups was shown particularly when it came to the phrase, "the poor you will always have with you." It is power, therefore, which leads to those in a dominated class adapting their interpretation to the experience of others - because power has convinced them that the experience of others is more reliable.

<u>God has a special concern for the oppressed:</u>

Green goes over in brief some of the well-covered ground concerning God's bias to the poor, laying stress on the three areas of gender, ethnicity and class for discussion about oppression. He adds, importantly for our purposes here, that while any group can 'go round the circle' of his theological method, "the outcome is less vibrant and gospel-orientated if the perspective of 'those who are heavy laden' is absent. Without that it is difficult to hear the gospel clearly, hard to understand what is happening in society, and an uphill battle to sustain a courageous witnessing spirituality," (Green, 1990, p.127). The obvious corollary of God's bias to the poor and the

oppressed is that the church should match it. Green, however, is saying more than that. He is saying not only that the church should be 'for' the poor but that its best theological work (which will include action) will be done when it sees through the eyes of the poor. Thus preferential option for the poor and the epistemological privilege of the poor go together - the former grows out of the latter. Here we find the debate which occupied us in the very first of the studies - the debate about whether or not the poor can be seen as the real church. It was in that debate that many of the pointers for future discussions were laid down - and many of the divisions as well. Echoes were heard in Cosmas Desmond's claim that only the oppressed could interpret the bible and in Sobrino's call to kenosis. If ever there was a point of commitment, this is it. This is where the dominant class in the church must not only recognize other experience as valid but must cede its hegemonic position. The point about power above is that the church must become, in its counter culture, a point of opposition to the hegemony of the dominant class in society. This is the point of decision between what the Kairos document refers to as church theology and that to which it refers as prophetic theology. Freire's argument that information is not enough, there must be will, still holds good.

A witnessing spirituality must be maintained:

Green spends a considerable amount of time on spirituality,

but perhaps the central part of what he has to say is in answer to the question, "where do we meet the divine," (Green, 1990, p.135f.). His first answer is: "we meet God in the oppressed." He quotes the passage which formed the basis of our fifth study, Matthew 25, where Jesus tells us that action for the least of his brethren is action for him. Sobrino too has spoken of the poor as the locus of privileged access to God. All the groups in the project found a little difficulty (somewhat guiltily) with this thought and struggled variously with thoughts around the treatment of the poor being the point of judgement for all of us. This same train of thought is contained in Green's second answer: "God is to be found in servanthood." The idea is here once more that faith is doing rather than believing - still a problem for many, even for those who see themselves as having no faith. Thirdly, says Green, "I meet God in the situation." This is not perhaps as vague and wooly as it might first appear. What he means is that God can be found wherever one is if one is prepared to meet him. Fourthly, we are made to address issues and they too represent an opportunity of finding God. Here we meet Freire's themes once more. Green quotes the Magnificat, the basis for study six, and sees there a great challenge to the church. God can also be found in a critical approach to one's own tradition. And these five ways of finding God can open up for us the spiritual and sacramental nature of our whole lives. All of this, he suggests is to be gathered into our worship:

> "a courageous spirituality is a gift of God to the committed worshipping community, and I have to witness to the fact that Christian groups who take up this challenge actively have noticed their worship has come alive in a remarkable way."
> (Green, 1990, p.139)

John Harvey is, however, perhaps not alone in pointing to worship (in whatever form) as being the hardest part of the development of local, and even alternative, forms of Christian life and thought. We noticed in study six that even some of those who are most committed to all that has been said about bias to the poor and all that goes with it, struggled when it came to worship. They (such as Miranda or Torres or Cullinan) struggled with the idea that worship can be carried out even in the midst of compromise with evil, or in the midst of apathy, or in the midst of oppression. Green is clearly of the view that celebration can be prospective as well as culminative - others are not so sure. Most participants in the study project, however, would agree with Green in his positive affirmation of worship even if they have not been part of the process which he has been describing. Harvey would agree with Green in principle about the centrality of the eucharist in this - it was after all the Gorbals group's enthusiasm for such celebration which led to questions being raised at meetings of presbytery. In practice he might be tempted to demur exactly because it was for those whom Green describes as 'committed' - it did not allow a way in for the ones we might refer to, in this context at least, as the 'spiritually marginalized'. Green's enthusiasm for eucharistic worship will of course owe much to the

different denominational background he has as compared with the participants in the study project. For our purposes here, it would seem that the question of worship as it connects with all the other points which have been raised still requires investigation.

All of Green's tent pegs, nevertheless, are to be put in position by the people's theologian. Our final question is a simple one: does the Church of Scotland already have in place a network of such people and are they not better known as parish ministers? When it is suggested that the church appoints evangelists, the answer is that that is what the ministers are - the reply would no doubt be the same if Laurie Green's proposal was put forward. There may be an argument for saying that that is what ministers should be, but it seems to be clear that at present they are not. If we look at the job description prepared by Green and listed above there are at least two vital elements of that description which cannot be said to be met: ministers are not, unless by pure chance and coincidence, equipped with group and adult education skills; neither is it in any way seen as important that ministers have integrity among the poor. Of the two, the second is the more important. The first could be seen as simply a recommendation for the adjustment of education for the ministry - and indeed a case for just such a change could be made without in any way disturbing the peace of mind of the church. The second, however, goes straight to

the heart of all that has been said. To take on board such a recommendation would involve a whole new world view for most of the church. It expresses straight away the bias to the poor which, as we have seen, fails to meet with universal approval. It highlights the gap which John Harvey so eloquently described between the church and the poor. It highlights, in other words, what <u>is</u> the case by advocating what is not.

In 1843 the Church of Scotland was riven by a dispute over patronage, over who appointed ministers and whose interests, therefore, they might be expected to serve. Having shown that the church is not immune from the class-based society in which it is situated and having demonstrated how dominant theology can operate within that situation, it might not be entirely inappropriate to ask whose interests the ministers of today, 150 years on from the Disruption, are expected to serve. If the answer to that question is other than the poor, we might legitimately go on to suggest that the mission of the church is in need of people who, in John Harvey's phrase, will do new things. Such novelty will indeed require local theology to break down the monolith of universal theology and bring a new sense of worth to those who have had to adapt themselves over the years to ways which are not their ways. People's theologians seem to be required - either as parish ministers or, perhaps more likely, as part of an alternative and parallel structure.

APPENDIX - THE DISCUSSION IN GROUP C ON STUDY THREE

[The passage from Ezekiel was read and briefly explained as being from the time of the exile in Babylon - Ezekiel's task being to point out to the people of Israel that they deserved their fate. The first question in the study was then addressed: - where does oppression come from? The quotations from Weil, Hanks, Gutierrez and Tamez were read through.]

DS. There are some answers there about where oppression comes from. Simone Weil is saying that it's just the way things are, Elsa Tamez is saying that it comes from people wanting to get richer and richer - which is the same kind of thing which Tom Hanks is saying. Gutierrez is a longer list but it includes that as well; but he has a thing which I think is the significant thing about this where he says that the finger is pointed at those who are to blame. And so when you think of oppression and in the light of poverty and suffering which were the topics before, the idea of thinking about them in terms of oppression is that there is someone to blame - its not that they just happen out of the air; poverty and suffering are brought by people - which is not what Simone Weil is saying. So I suppose the first question is: do you think that when people are in poverty or when they are suffering or when they are oppressed, is it just the way things are or are there people to blame?

Voice 1 - I think there are people you can point to and say it's their fault; I don't think you can say that it's just the way things are; there's bound to be some cause somewhere which brings about the effect; I don't think it's just in the nature of things ... well, I suppose in some ways it's in the nature of things because there are some people whose nature is always to want more wealth, but I don't think it's just something that's there from the beginning.

DS. Is there anyone who thinks that poverty or suffering or oppression are just inevitable, a part of life?

Voice 2 - Well I suppose it is in Third World countries; they can't seem to find their way out of it, can they? I think they do just accept that that is their lot.

Voice 1 - I wouldn't say that it is. I think it's that they don't earn their fair share.

Voice 3 - I think there's a fine example of oppression in Eastern countries just now - like Eastern Germany and especially in the Rumanian situation. I think it's been brought

about by men, you know? How could they build these buildings and store all that stuff and deprive all the people of food, even, of a way of life?

DS. Do you think if there are people to blame that it's simply a desire for wealth, is that the main thing?

Voice 4 - And power, I think it's got to be.

Voice 2 - In this country.

Voice 4 - The way that society's structured - they don't care about the poor; from the government down, it's just the way that it's structured. I mean I work in welfare rights, so I know they're telling people that they can't get what they can and it causes such a pain - caused by the government that could change so many things.

DS. So in a sense it's the way things are but the way things are is created by people.

Voice 4 - I mean these things can be changed if the people at the top want to change them, but it's getting that way that now people just give in and they just don't argue any more.

Voice 3 - But even the Third World countries, Ethiopia for instance, we all contributed towards the famine and yet their own people stopped the stuff from getting through. You know, we're back to square one and the folk are still starving there because somebody's having a war and stopping the stuff from getting through.

DS. And that's wealth again?

Voice 2 - Greed.

Voice 3 - How could they have money to buy guns and that to kill each other and their families are dying of hunger?

DS. Lets go on to: who are oppressed? There's a reference in Ezekiel to the ill-treatment of the alien, the immigrant. The first quotation from John Berger is really about a system which exists in France and Germany rather than here, where people come in from places like Turkey as guest workers and they have no rights.

[The quotation is then read, as are the others under the second question - apart from the last which participants were asked to read themselves.]

DS. These are suggestions. The question at the beginning was: who are oppressed? These are various suggestions of who you might think of as being oppressed - from migrants to immigrants to people demonstrating in China to women in general, South African children, and prisoners. Some of them get a direct mention in the passage [from Ezekiel] and others you might think of in that context. I wonder if you think that all those groups actually are oppressed, for example what about the last one which is about prisoners. Do you think prisoners are oppressed or do you think that they're just getting what they had coming to them?

Voice 2 - That's a hard one. I suppose it depends on what they've done. I know we're not supposed to judge, but I mean if it was a person who'd murdered your kid you would want him to be slapped about every day - I certainly would. But political prisoners - I feel sorry for them.

Voice 3 - I suppose they're oppressed because they can't get way from it, they've no freedom and they have to take it.

Voice 2 - And they can't fight back, can they?

DS. I was hearing recently that actually prisoners aren't put in prison for the prisoners but for everyone else - so that we know that they're tucked safely away and we can forget about them for five or ten years or however long they're in.

Voice 1 - On the other hand some of them aren't put away.

DS. What about things like Amnesty International? You do hear voices saying why should you support an organisation that's trying to get prisoners released.

Voice 2 - Oh no, I think that's a good organisation - they're political prisoners, they're locked up because they spoke up.

DS. Do you think ex-prisoners are oppressed? Do you think people who have done their time and then come out are ever able to put that behind them?

Voice 4 - I don't know if they're allowed to really.

Voice 2 - Apart from certain people like Jimmy Boyle.

Voice 4 - I would imagine that really it would be quite difficult if you go to get a job and there are about half a dozen people there and five hadn't been to jail and you had, I don't suppose you would get the job. So I don't suppose you can ever really put it behind you - but it depends what you did, of course.

Voice 2 - I don't think you can really say that they're oppressed, mind. I think oppressed is about Peking and South Africa - that to me is oppression. A prisoner can ... I suppose they are in a way but ...

DS. Lets move on to the others - what about this view of women from 1783?

[Laughter]

Voice 4 - Well I suppose back then it was ... it's moved on a bit since then.

Voice 2 - The early nineteen hundreds too.

DS. Where I got the quotation was out of Germaine Greer's book, The Female Eunuch - and that comes from the early 1970's - so she obviously thought it was still relevant.

Voice 1 - Well I think it undoubtedly is.

Voice 2 - In certain places.

Voice 4 - Yes, I suppose it is. In India ...

Voice 1 - In this country.

Voice 2 - I was getting quite upset at the bible, especially Matthew which I've been reading - but I've started to read Acts and that's a lot better, cause it's always men: man this, and never woman - and I was getting a wee bit paranoid about it and wondered why it was that God only likes men.

DS. Get hold of the Revised English Bible, the new one that's just out. It's an update on the New English Bible. It takes all the "men" bits out.

Voice 3 - Is it easier to read?

DS. I think it's good.

Voice 2 - It's quite upsetting actually.

Voice 3 - Aye, it is because ...

Voice 2 - Because I never really thought women mattered in God's eyes.

Voice 3 - And yet there are other bits about women in the bible which are really beautiful - like when Jesus ...

DS. In the first chapter of Genesis in most bibles it says: "And God created man in his own image." In the Revised English Bible it says, "And God created human beings in his own image," which is actually correct because it goes on to say, "so he created man; male and female he created them."

Voice 2 - Are you not changing the bible, then?

Voice 4 - That's just changing to suit now.

DS. That's what it says in the Hebrew.

Voice 2 - Is it? Cause you're not wanting just to change it to suit yourself; you want to hear the word as it is.

DS. And in Romans 16.1 there's a bit which has always said, "Give my regards to Phoebe," then it usually says, "a worker in the church," or, "a deaconess," but the Revised English Bible says, "a minister in the church," which is correct because the word that's used in that verse for Phoebe is the word that's used in various other parts of the New Testament about men and it's translated then as, "minister," but this is the first translation since there were women ministers and they have suddenly felt able to translate it properly.

Voice 2 - In Acts, is Saul Paul - or is Paul Saul?

DS. Yes. After his conversion, he becomes Paul ... Now what about these women here? You were saying that this is still quite relevant, but there seemed to be an opinion that it wasn't relevant anymore.

Voice 2 - Well it's not really as bad as it was then, but it's still like that quite a lot, definitely, but I wouldn't regard myself as a slave.

Voice 4 - Maybe more a slave to your children than you are to your man.

Voice 1 - When a man does rule in that way, then a woman is a slave.

Voice 2 - Well it doesn't work in this household. He does his share of cooking and everything - and changing nappies.

DS. What it's suggesting in particular is that often the biggest opponents of women's liberation are women - do you think that's right? There's a theory that the way mothers bring up their sons ... if they run around after them and do everything for them, then the sons expect their wives to do the same.

Voice 2 - Yes, I found that - but it doesn't work now. And I don't do that with my sons.

Voice 3 - We were all brought up to equal shares, boys and girls.

DS. I remember an evening in rural France being with a family where the men sat and ate a constant supply of apple pastries being produced by the women - so I'm sure there are still places where things haven't changed.

Voice 4 - I get upset at toys - girls' toys and boys' toys, I refuse to buy a toy hoover and a toy iron and it really gets me so angry.

Voice 2 - I've found that the boys play more with the girls' toys and the girls play more with the boys' toys.

Voice 4 - Aye, and my Dad goes mad: what's wrong with that laddie?

DS. We passed on our daughter's pink wellies on to our son [applause] ... he wore them to school one day and refused to wear them again.

Voice 2 - My brother bought my husband a pink jumper for his Christmas and he's only worn it once and he won't wear it again.

Voice 4 - See, that's us doing it to each other.

DS. Do you think that the position of women has changed in the last ten years for the better or for the worse?

Voice 4 - I don't know; there's more pressure on you now to be working, the perfect mother, and juggle everything. If mothers aren't going out to work and staying in the house, people say, "Oh, she's a lazy bitch, she could be out working," and if she does go out working and don't stay with the kids, its, "isn't that awful, having another woman to bring up your kids." It's difficult trying to win, it's hard.

DS. That's quite oppressive, don't you think, being in a situation where you can't win?

Voice 2 - If a mum's wanting to stay at home and bring up her kids, I think that should be her choice.

Voice 3 - It should be your choice.

Voice 1 - I think it's maybe changed a bit the women' lib way in that women are more accepting that and going for it particularly further up the scale, in the professional classes and that.

DS. What do you think about positive discrimination?

Voice 4 - People should be judged on their merits. If they're the person for the job it shouldn't matter about the colour of their skin or whether they're male or female or whatever - it's what their qualifications are.

DS. The SDP started it and the Labour Party more recently about deliberately so that more women have to be on certain bodies - it's the same kind of thing, do you think that's right?

Voice 4 - Well it can't be wrong!

Voice 3 - Nothing more frustrating though, if you're all doing the same job and you're held at a certain level and you're just as capable as that lad next door to you, and you're kept back because you're a woman - that really gets under my skin. I've had a basin full of that in my time.

Voice 4 - And it's when you go for the job and they say, "what about the kids? who looks after them?" I mean you wouldn't ask a man that.

Voice 3 - When you've both started off in a job at the same time, you know, you're both doing the same job and you've reached the same level and sometimes you've got further forward than the lad has and you're both going for the same job and, just because it's policy that the woman doesn't go higher than a certain level, he gets it. That really gets under my skin.

Voice 2 - A lot of them do that cause they think the women are going to leave and get married and have children and its a load of rubbish.

DS. What about David Smith's one? Do you think that people in this country of West Indian or Asian origin are members of an oppressed class?

Voice 3 - Well this is very much in the headlines now, isn't it? We're getting it on the television. Every week now there's a report about the Asians and the coloureds and the different creeds. You could say that about any ... you could say that about the Scots and the English and the Irish and the Welsh.

Voice 2 - The English oppress the Scots.

Voice 3 - It doesn't have to be a difference in the colour of your skin; it just has to be the way you speak.

Voice 4 - I think they keep themselves to themselves though. I don't think they want to integrate which makes them targets for a lot of things - basically because of people's ignorance, they don't know a lot about them because they do keep themselves to themselves. Wherever they stay they make little communities for themselves, so its very difficult to try and get to know them. They really just don't want to get to know you.

Voice 3 - There's a barrier, a right barrier.

Voice 4 - I don't know who makes that barrier though.

Voice 2 - I remember there was some Vietnamese boat people that stayed in ... and we got to know them and they were the nicest boys you could have met but they were the only ones in that part and they all just drifted down to London and to Livingston where the rest of them were.

Voice 3 - In the West Midlands you get the West Indians; in Wolverhampton you get the Asian community; Leeds where they came for the wool and things like that you get the Muslims all gathered in you could say cliques.

Voice 2 - They found they were the only Vietnamese here, in this part, and they coudn't really speak good English and so they were getting into trouble with the police and all the rest of it; and people just sort of targetted on them and so of course they just moved away.

DS. Do you think it makes a difference to other people's reactions how many there are of a minority group? I have heard it said that one family can be a 'curiosity' but that its when there are a lot of families that people feel threatened - even though a town of 20,000 could feel threatened by a hundred.

Voice 3 - Well, in a varsity town like ours is here, at one time we had occasional students who came but there was no racialism; because he was one-off. It's when they start to come in and become families and have more families and they almost seem to take over a district - that's when you still think there's no racialism because you're going back to when this one student came to study in Edinburgh. When you had maybe one Indian doctor or one Nigerian doctor serving in the Royal Infirmary or the Western General, but now ...

DS. How was your Kenyan minister?

Voice 3 - We thought he was fine, but he wasn't; he ran into trouble. And we weren't aware of it - where he stayed. He never let on that he ran into trouble with his neighbours. A better disciple never came out of any country. But it wasn't till he was away that we were aware that there was prejudice within that area to him.

Voice 2 - Was it verbal?

Voice 3 - More or less.

DS. There's someone who you presumably couldn't accuse of not joining in.

Voice 3 - He was great. He went into folks' homes who were members of the church and met nothing there, but it was folk outwith the church that ...

DS. You see in Ezekiel what it says is, "the common people resort to oppression, they oppress the alien." If you go to somewhere like London where there's support for groups like the National Front, its generally folk at the bottom of the scale - unemployed youngsters who have never had anything and aren't likely to get anything. Do you think there's a point when those who feel trodden on have to find someone else to tread on in there turn and therefore they turn to people who come in or seem different?

Voice 1 - I think the only basis that these groups work on is that those people are taking the jobs they should have, the houses they should have - they feel oppressed.

DS. It obviously isn't a new problem - Ezekiel was talking about it.

Voice 3 - I think it's getting worse from what you hear in the news and things like that - it's not going to be an easy problem to solve.

DS. We've concentrated on the ones which more obviously relate to this country. What about Chicane, and Fathers and Higgins. I've heard folk say that the state of emergency which Chicane is talking about and which is still in place, the oppression there, isn't down to greed but fear and that it's a kind of panic reaction. Do you think that's right or do you think that it's fear of losing their wealth?

Voice 1 - It's big bullies.

Voice 3 - It's a fear of losing their power. I mean that's been obvious where they've thrashed into them with these batons and what have you. And more so with that Chinese where that lad was standing in the middle of these tanks.

DS. So do you think that the two situations there are quite similar.

Voices 1&2 - In a way.

Voice 3 - The big guns come out. They frighten the people.

Voice 2 - If you can't do it one way ...

Voice 3 - Do it another.

DS. There's various groups there. Is there anyone you would think of as being oppressed who isn't mentioned there?

Voice 4 - I suppose anybody who's different from the norm.

Voice 2 - Or people who can't fight back, like kids.

Voice 4 - Homosexuals, gays, lesbians - have a lot of difficulties.

Voice 2 - I think anybody who's kind of different from the majority of people who live around will be oppressed, some way or other.

Voice 3 - Children more so, I think - I mean they're wide open to things happening to them.

Voice 4 - And they're so trusting.

DS. Do you think that there's any way in which you would think of yourselves as being oppressed?

Voice 4 - Depends what you compare it with - it's like poverty, you can only work out what poverty is by comparing it to what 'rich' is. If you compare the way we live our lives, and I think I'm quite poor, but if I was to go away and live in Ethiopia, I would think I was quite rich - with carpets and so on. We're really quite lucky - so it depends on how you compare it.

Voice 3 - I think sometimes workers must feel oppressed, when they get someone over them who is the bully type and there's no outlet for them to let it be known without them thinking that this is a clipe or something like that. And that can get through to you in all

walks of life if there's somebody - it doesn't have to be a worker even but even working with someone; some people have a tendency to do that to others, to try and override them.

Voice 2 - You can feel like that even with the council - trying to get a bigger house from them and you can't get it; or even trying to get a house.

DS. I wondered about this text for a "Kirking of the Council", "the city's leaders are like wolves tearing at their prey."

Voice 3 - Well they have improved, there's no getting away from that because I remember at one time you went up to that City Chambers and I mean really you had no privacy - now at least you have privacy, they take you into an interview room - but give a person a pencil and a piece of paper and they think they're God, no matter what you say you're wrong. Nowadays at least there's no shouting over a counter.

Voice 2 - The Housing Department are like that as well. They're really bad, they're power-crazy. You go up to the counter and they take you into an interview room but there's this great big partition and this great big desk between you and the housing officer.

DS. Do they still have the floor-to-ceiling glass panels?

Voice 4 - They've got to because they're so nasty.

Voice 3 - And especially where you pay the rent, they used to have that because of the trouble they used to have.

DS. Would you say claimants were oppressed?

Voice 4 - Well in the office we deal with, they must be trained by Gestapo officers because they are really awful, horrible people. They're general attitude is, "What on earth have they done with their money? They only got their Giro cheque two days ago and there's no way that they can come down here. For goodness sake, what have they done with the money?" So we say well naturally they've been to the pub and they've been to the bingo and they've smoked it all and they'd like some more money.

Voice 2 - That attitude really gets me. I want to say you come up here and you live on that for a few weeks on income support and see how you get on. It's this attitude that

everyone's just scroungers, they'll no get out of their beds to work - and they're treated worse than animals.

DS. - Do you think its worse than other places or are they all the same?

Voice 4 - It is bad. In another office the chap actually comes out and says have a seat. The one here it's, "What are you wanting now?"

DS. - Is it one of these where the seats are actually screwed to the floor?

Voice 4 - But they now have piped music which come through.

Voice 2 - That must be nice!

Voice 4 - It's just this prejudging people, thinking everybody's the same. There are scroungers in every walk of life from the top to the bottom - people who think they can screw the system and get away with it. But it's this attitude that everyone's the same - and there's some sorry sights who come in and you get so angry. If I had the money I'ld be saying, here take it because what they're put through, they're almost put on their knees to beg for money.

Voice 2 - My downstairs neighbour, she's away now, but she was one of they people that whatever she wanted she could go and get it, but see if you went you had the biggest fight of your life to get anything out of them.

Voice 3 - And it's not only money. Some of these doctors surgeries you go into where they have these large reception areas and some of these receptionists are a delight, I'll tell you. We're very fortunate at our doctor but some of them are really dreadful. They're asking you what's wrong with you as if they had the qualifications.

DS. - So is it authority that turns people?

All - Oh, yes.

Voice 3 - I'm sorry to say this but women are worse.

Voice 2 - And if they've a uniform to go with it it's even more ...

DS. - Let's move on to number three, "How do we react?" That is "we" meaning the church in general. The first suggestion comes from Julius Nyerere of Tanzania ...

[The various quotations are read.]

The question is, how do we react. If we start with Anthony Archer who is saying that the church is primarily middle class, grounded in the status quo and keen on preserving it, and on the side of the powerful. Is that the church you know or read about or hear about? Did anyone hear the editor of Life and Work resigning because he doesn't feel at home in the left-wing Church of Scotland? They can't actually both be right - Anthony Archer and Kernohan. I presume that Robert Kernohan feels that the Church of Scotland has moved from the position that Anthony Archer is describing and he doesn't like it.

Voice 1 - I'm not sure that what has moved makes any real difference.

DS - Do you think there are two separate things here - the one talking about central committees and the other talking about local parishes?

Voice 1 - Do you think that he is saying that the Roman Catholic Church used to be more working class and it has now become more middle class?

DS - He is saying that over the last 100 or 50 and particularly over the last 20 years, the Catholic Church has made big efforts to get more into the mainstream and become more acceptable in the corridors of power. An example he gives is that Basil Hume now stands beside the Archbishop of Canterbury on state occasions whereas before that would never have happened. And the price to be paid for that is the inability to be a part of working class life in England. What we have here is the way his book finishes. His book is called: "The Two Catholic Churches, A Study in Oppression." Do you think the Church of Scotland, nationally or locally, serves the interests of the powerful?

Voice 2 - I wouldn't say that. I think it serves the interests - I'ld better watch what I'm saying here. I think it serves the interests of what most people want. I would rather be like the first disciples, learning about God and the bible - the spiritual side of it, rather than moaning about who's making the tea, who's in charge of this committee, who's in charge of the next committee. Who's bothered? But there are quite a lot in the church who are bothered. To me personally, I think it would be nicer.

Voice 4 - I totally agree with you. I think it's far too inward looking, sitting arguing about stupid things like meetings. I've seen someone totally outraged because there was no-one there to wash the cups.

Voice 3 - But a willing hand is the best thing you can have.

Voice 2 - But that's not the most important thing in the church.

Voice 3 - But if you shut your eyes to these things instead of stepping forward, it can all be a muddle.

Voice 2 - What I mean is it would be nice if we had the spiritual side as well rather than reports. It would be nice if we could put God first. New Christians don't come back to the church because they're not getting fed enough; they think you've got to ...

Voice 4 - When I first started in the Kirk, I'ld been there three weeks and there was one Sunday I went with an old pair of jeans on and my trainers, so it happened that the minister was preaching a sermon on 'don't judge a book by its cover', that clothes are not important, that where you live is not important, if you happen to live somewhere and you don't have any furniture its not important. And I listened and I thought that's really good; and I went to get a cup of tea and there were two old wifies sitting there saying, "imagine coming to the church with a pair of jeans on." And I said, "Excuse me, did you not listen to that man? Don't you speak to me like that." And I didn't go back for about three weeks and the minister asked me why I wasn't going to the church, and I said, "I'll tell you why I'm no going to the church ..." But I thought why do people go there, is it just habit because they're not listening?

Voice 2 - And you're so sensitive and sometimes its hard to keep going.

Voice 3 - But I remember when that church was full and they used to come in all states and you just accepted it.

Voice 2 - My biggest dread was taking my kids into that church because I knew that one would run riot and he did. Nobody stopped him but you could hear the tutting and I thought, well it's natural. Some people are going to react like that and at first it did bother me, but now it doesn't.

Voice 3 - When you get to the age that these people are, maybe you'll be the one who'll be saying, "That's an awful noise!" Just think about that - these are the folk who have come up through the church and now they cannae hear. I mean some churches you're scared to go in, you're tiptoeing through the door.

Voice 4 - Some churches they have their own seats and if you sit in someone else's seat, they go mad.

DS - What about connecting what Anthony Archer says with what Julius Nyerere says. He says that the church should be supporting people against injustice rather than doling out charity. Now I wonder if maybe the churches are traditionally and even still are not better at the doling out of charity and if that is actually part of what Anthony Archer is getting at - that you give money to the poor rather than asking why the poor are poor. Do you think that's right? Because support against injustice is a kind of political side of things which people react against.

Voice 1 - It's like what they say about the third world - give them a fishing boat, not fish.

Voice 3 - There's nothing more demoralising than getting handed charity, regardless of where it comes from. I think the support should be in kind.

Voice 2 - I mean it's alright giving them charity but that doesn't help the problem.

Voice 3 - And you shouldn't make it obvious you're giving them charity.

Voice 2 - There's more to it than just giving charity and going away thinking you've done your bit.

DS - There's a good quote from Helder Camara who's a bishop in Brazil who said, when I feed the hungry they call me a saint, when I ask why the poor are hungry they call me a communist.
Jim Wallis, talking to most Western countries I would have thought, he's putting it that poverty is there because of how people live. Do you think that people think that; do you think the people he was originally addressing in America think that and do you think that people here in Britain think that? That famine in Africa or poverty in South America isn't their fault, it's ours. Or do you think that most people think the poor are poor because they haven't done things properly?

Voice 1 - I think that some people do like to think that because of these things and because of tribes fighting between themselves like in Ethiopia. There are people who believe that it is their own fault. And there are others that think that if we could only make them all industrialize that it would in some way change the whole scene.

DS. - We'll need to stop in a minute. I want to finish with Cosmas Desmond's one where he is saying about South Africa that the white church there is not even in a position to interpret the gospel. All it can do is listen to those who are oppressed and in terms of Jim Wallis' thing that would mean that most churches in the developed world are not in a position to interpret the gospel. Is that taking things a bit far?

Voice 1 - Well I think that in South Africa that the white church interprets the gospel its own way - the way it wants, that God lays down that it's a white world and certainly a white country and the Dutch church there definitely interprets it to its own advantage.

DS - Do you think that in Edinburgh that a group like this in one of the affluent suburbs could interpret what the bible has to say about poverty or is it only possible for folk who have some idea of what poverty means in their own lives.

Voice 4 - It's difficult really to fully understand poverty unless you've experienced it yourself. It would depend how its done. Sometimes it's really condescending but I don't think anybody really knows what poverty is unless they've lived it. You can try and understand it but until you've been there ...

DS. - Do you think that affects how you express your faith or understand your faith?

Voice 4 - I think it does because it makes you want to follow what Jesus says and that is to help the poor and if you understand what it is like to be poor it makes you want to help and you know how to help because you've been in it yourself.

Voice 2 - You know what to do that could help. That's why you can say that if a Christian has been through hard times you might have been put there by God so that you can help other people in that situation. Because Jesus has been through everything that could happen to understand us. That's why God lets things happen to us so that we can understand and help other people.

Voice 1 - I wouldn't say he necessarily lets things happen. He'll use a situation.

Voice 2 - Yes. He'll use that later on in your life.

Voice 3 - It makes you very well aware, going through poverty. We had it when we were young, the likes of 1926 or 1930's when your parents were struggling to bring you up. It made you really grateful when you got on your own two feet that you were able to get ahead. I don't how our parents did it. And still kept their faith and brought you up in the faith - and it must have been sorely tried at times.

Voice 4 - Sometimes its a stronger faith.

Voice 1 - There's no way I, for instance, could understand poverty because even as a wee kid I had money when I wanted it.

DS - How does that put somebody like Tony Benn who is the champion of the left but who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth? How do folk see someone like that who is supposed to be the champion of the poor, so to speak?

Voice 2 - They make me laugh.

Voice 4 - I think it depends on how they do it, some folk can be really condescending but some people who are wealthy do understand to a certain extent and I think it's good that these people are doing that but not in the way of, "Oh look at that poor man!"

Voice 3 - But he's been there, you know, he's seen it. He's not lived it but he's seen it and seen what it does to people.

Voice 2 - But then there's some of them like the one who said that he could live ... That was ridiculous.

Voice 3 - I mean you could get enough money to live for a week. Even two or three months, but one week!

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